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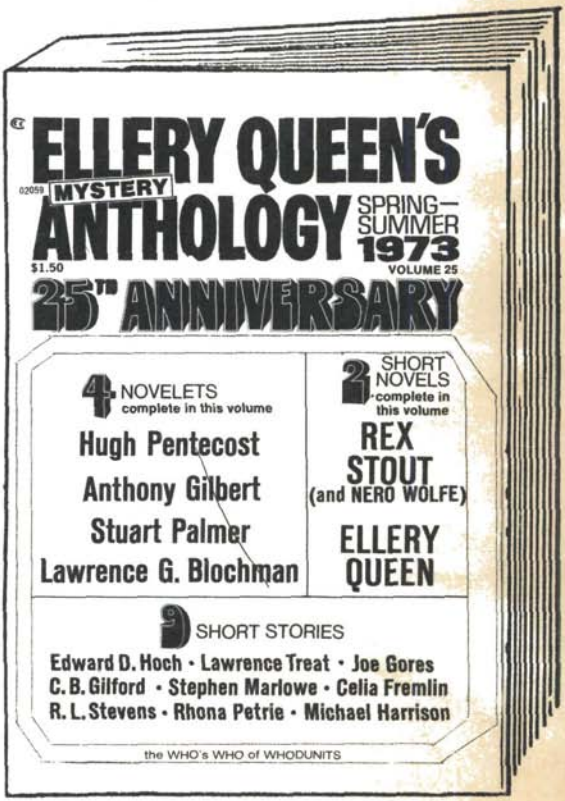

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a *NEW* crime story by

PATRICIA HIGHSMITH

How long does hate have to fester before it bursts into murder? Seventeen years—is that long enough? Dr. Stephen McCullough toyed with the idea . . .

One of Patricia Highsmith's most delicate probings into the hearts and minds of people . . .

WHO DIES, WHO LIVES?

by PATRICIA HIGHSMITH

Dr. Stephen McCullough had a first-class compartment to himself on the express from Paris to Geneva. He sat browsing in one of the medical quarterlies he had brought from America, but he was not concentrating. He was toying with the idea of murder. That was why he had taken the train instead of flying, to give himself time to think or perhaps merely to dream.

He was a serious man of 45, a little overweight, with a prominent and spreading nose, a brown mustache, brown-rimmed glasses, a receding hairline. His eyebrows were tense with an inward anxiety, which his patients often thought a concern with their problems. Actually, he was unhappily married, and though he refused to quarrel with Lillian—that meant answer her back—there was discord between them.

In Paris yesterday he had answered Lillian back, and on a ridiculous matter about whether he or she would return an evening bag to a shop on the Rue Royale, a bag Lillian had decided she did not want. He had been angry not because he had had to take the bag back, but because he had agreed, in a weak moment fifteen minutes before, to visit Roger Fane in Geneva.

"Go and see him, Steve," Lillian had said yesterday morning. "You're so close to Geneva now, why not? Think of the pleasure it would give Roger."

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What pleasure? Why? But Dr. McCullough had rung Roger at the American Embassy in Geneva, and Roger had been very friendly—much too friendly, of course—and had said that Stephen must come and stay a few days and that he had plenty of room to put him up. Dr. McCullough had agreed to spend one night. Then he was going to fly to Rome to join Lillian.

Dr. McCullough detested Roger Fane. It was the kind of hatred that time does nothing to diminish. Roger Fane, seventeen years ago, had married the woman Dr. McCullough loved. Margaret. Margaret had died a year ago in an automobile accident on an Alpine road.

Roger Fane was smug, cautious, mightily pleased with himself, and not very intelligent. Seventeen years ago Roger Fane had told Margaret that he, Stephen McCullough, was having a secret affair with another girl. Nothing was further from the truth, but before Stephen could prove anything, Margaret had married Roger. Dr. McCullough had not expected the marriage to last, but it had, and finally Dr. McCullough had married Lillian whose face resembled Margaret's a little, but that was the only similarity. In the past seventeen years Dr. McCullough had seen Roger and Margaret perhaps three times when they had come to New York on short trips. He had not seen Roger since Margaret's death.

Now as the train shot through the French countryside Dr. McCullough reflected on the satisfaction that murdering Roger Fane would give him. He had never before thought of murdering anybody, but yesterday evening while he was taking a bath in the Paris hotel, after the telephone conversation with Roger, a thought had come to him in regard to murder: most murderers were caught because they left some clue, despite their efforts to erase all the clues. Many murderers wanted to be caught, the doctor realized, and unconsciously planted a clue that led the police straight to them. In the Leopold and Loeb case one of them had dropped his glasses at the scene, for instance.

But suppose a murderer deliberately left a dozen clues, practically down to his calling card? It seemed to Dr. McCullough that the very obviousness of it would throw off suspicion. Especially if the person were a man like himself, well thought of, a non-violent type. Also, there'd be no motive that anyone could see, because Dr. McCullough had never even told Lillian that he had loved the

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woman Roger Fane had married. Of course, a few of his old friends knew it, but Dr. McCullough hadn't mentioned Margaret or Roger Fane in a decade.

He imagined Roger's apartment as formal and gloomy, perhaps with a servant prowling about full time, a servant who slept in. A servant would complicate things. Let's say there wasn't a servant who slept in, that he and Roger would be having a nightcap in the living room or in Roger's study, and then just before saying good night, Dr. McCullough would pick up a heavy paperweight or a big vase and—then he would calmly take his leave. Of course, the bed should be slept in, since he was supposed to stay the night, so perhaps the morning would be better for the crime than the evening. The essential thing was to leave quietly and at the time he was supposed to leave. But the doctor found himself unable to plot in much detail after all.

Roger Fane's street in Geneva looked just as Dr. McCullough had imagined it—a narrow curving street that combined business establishments with old private dwellings—and it was not too well lighted when Dr. McCullough's taxi entered it at nine P.M.; yet in law-abiding Switzerland, the doctor supposed, dark streets held few dangers for anyone. The front door buzzed in response to his ring, and Dr. McCullough opened it. The door was as heavy as a bank vault's door.

"Hello!" Roger's voice called cheerily down the stairwell. "Come up! I'm on the third floor. Fourth to you, I suppose."

"Be right there," Dr. McCullough said, shy about raising his voice in the presence of the closed doors on either side of the hall. He had telephoned Roger a few minutes before from the railway station, because Roger had said he would meet him. Roger had apologized and said he had been held up at a meeting at his office, and would Steve mind hopping a taxi and coming right over? Dr. McCullough suspected that Roger had not been held up at all, but simply hadn't wanted to show him the courtesy of being at the station.

"Well, well, Steve!" said Roger, pumping Dr. McCullough's hand. "It's great to see you again. Come in, come in. Is that thing heavy?" Roger made a pass at the doctor's suitcase, but the doctor caught it up first.

"Not at all. Good to see you again, Roger." He went into the apartment.

There were oriental rugs, or-

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nate lamps that gave off dim light. It was even stuffier than Dr. McCullough had anticipated. Roger looked a trifle thinner. He was shorter than the doctor, and had sparse blond hair. His weak face perpetually smiled. Both had eaten dinner, so they drank Scotch in the living room.

"So you're joining Lillian in Rome tomorrow," said Roger. "Sorry you won't be staying longer. I'd intended to drive you out to the country tomorrow evening to meet a friend of mine. A woman," Roger added with a smile.

"Oh? Too bad. Yes, I'll be off on the one o'clock plane tomorrow afternoon. I made the reservation from Paris." Dr. McCullough found himself speaking automatically. Strangely, he felt a little drunk, though he'd taken only a couple of sips of his Scotch. It was because of the falsity of the situation, he thought, the falsity of his being here at all, of his pretending friendship or at least friendliness. And Roger's smile irked him, so merry and yet so forced.

Roger hadn't referred to Margaret, though Dr. McCullough had not seen him since she died. But then, neither had the doctor referred to her, even to give a few words of condolence. And already, it seemed, Roger had another female interest. Roger was just over 40, still trim of figure and bright of eye. And Margaret, that jewel among women, was just something that had come his way, stayed a while, and departed, Dr. McCullough supposed. Roger looked not at all bereaved.

The doctor detested Roger fully as much as he had on the train, but the reality of Roger Fane was somewhat dismaying. If Stephen killed him, he would have to touch him, or feel the resistance of his flesh to the object he hit him with. And what was the servant situation?

As if Roger read his mind, he said, "I've a girl who comes in to clean every morning at ten and leaves at twelve. If you want her to do anything for you—wash and iron a shirt or something like that—don't hesitate. She's very fast, or can be if you ask her. Her name's Yvonne."

Then the telephone rang. Roger spoke in French. His face fell slightly as he agreed to do something that the other person was asking him to do.

Roger said to the doctor, "Of all the irritating things! I've got to catch the seven o'clock plane to Zurich tomorrow. Some visiting fireman's being welcomed at a breakfast. So, old man, I suppose I'll be gone before you're out of bed."

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"Oh!" Dr. McCullough found himself chuckling. "You think doctors aren't used to early calls? Of course I'll get up to say goodbye and see you off."

Roger's smile widened slightly. "Well, we'll see. I certainly won't wake you for it. Make yourself at home and I'll leave a note for Yvonne to prepare coffee and rolls. Or would you like a more substantial brunch around eleven?"

Dr. McCullough was not thinking about what Roger was saying. He had just noticed a rectangular marble pen-and-pencil holder on the desk where the telephone stood. He was looking at Roger's high and faintly pink forehead.

"Oh, brunch," said the doctor vaguely. "No, no, for goodness' sake. They feed you enough on the plane."

And then his thoughts leaped to Lillian and the quarrel yesterday in Paris. Hostility smoldered in him. Had Roger ever quarreled with Margaret? Dr. McCullough could not imagine Margaret being unfair, being mean. It was no wonder Roger's face looked relaxed and untroubled.

"A penny for your thoughts," said Roger, getting up to replenish his glass.

The doctor's glass was still half full.

"I suppose I'm a bit tired," said Dr. McCullough, and passed his hand across his forehead. When he lifted his head again, he saw a photograph of Margaret which he had not noticed before on the top of the highboy on his right. Margaret in her twenties, as she had looked when Roger married her, as she had looked when the doctor had so loved her. Dr. McCullough looked suddenly at Roger. His hatred returned in a wave that left him physically weak.

"I suppose I'd better turn in," he said, setting his glass carefully on the little table in front of him and standing up. Roger had showed him his bedroom.

"Sure you wouldn't like a spot of brandy?" asked Roger. "You look all in." Roger smiled cockily, standing very straight.

The tide of the doctor's anger flowed back. He picked up the marble slab with one hand, and before Roger could step back, smashed him in the forehead with its base. It was a blow that would kill, the doctor knew. Roger fell and without even a last twitch lay still and limp.

The doctor set the marble holder back where it had been, picked up the pen and pencil which had fallen, replaced them, then wiped the marble

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with his handkerchief where his fingers had touched it and also the pen and pencil. Roger's forehead was bleeding slightly. He felt Roger's still warm wrist and found no pulse. Then he went down the hall to his own room.

He awakened the next morning at 8:15, after a mediocre night's sleep. He showered in the bathroom between his room and Roger's bedroom, shaved, dressed, and left the house at a quarter past nine. A hall went from his room past the kitchen to the apartment door; it had not been necessary to cross the living room, and even if he had glanced into the living room, Roger's body would have been out of sight to him. Dr. McCullough had not glanced in.

At 5:30 P.M. he was in Rome, riding in a taxi from the airport to the Hotel Majestic where Lillian awaited him. Lillian was out, however. The doctor had some coffee sent up, and it was then that he noticed his brief case was missing. He had wanted to lie on the bed and drink coffee and read his medical quarterlies. Now he remembered distinctly: for some reason he had carried his brief case into Roger's living room last evening.

This did not disturb him at all. It was exactly what he would have done on purpose if he had thought of it. His name and his New York address were written in the slot of the brief case. And Dr. McCullough supposed that Roger had written his name in full in some engagement book along with the time of his arrival.

He found Lillian in good humor. She had bought a lot of things in the Via Condotti. They had dinner and then took a carozza ride through the Villa Borghese, to the Piazza di Spagna and the Piazza del Populo. If there were anything in the papers about Roger, Dr. McCullough was ignorant of it. He bought only the Paris *Herald-Tribune*, which was a morning paper.

The news came the next morning as he and Lillian were breakfasting at Donay's in the Via Veneto. It was in the Paris *Herald-Tribune*, and there was a picture of Roger Fane on the front page, a serious, official picture of him in a wing collar.

"Good Lord!" said Lillian. "Why, it happened the night you were there!"

Looking over her shoulder, Dr. McCullough pretended surprise. " '—died some time between eight P.M. and three A.M.,' " the doctor read. "I said good night to him about eleven, I think, then went into my room."

"You didn't *hear* anything?"

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"No. My room was down a hall. I closed my door."

"And the next morning. You didn't—"

"I told you, Roger had to catch a seven o'clock plane. I assumed he was gone. I left the house around nine."

"And all the time he was lying dead in the living room!" Lillian said with a gasp. "Steve! Why, this is terrible!"

Was it, Dr. McCullough wondered. Was it so terrible for her? Her voice did not sound really concerned. He looked into her wide eyes. "It's certainly terrible—but I'm not responsible, God knows. Don't worry about it, Lillian."

The police were at the Hotel Majestic when they returned, waiting for Dr. McCullough in the lobby. They were both plainclothes Swiss police, and they spoke English. They interviewed Dr. McCullough at a table in a corner of the lobby. Lillian had, at Dr. McCullough's insistence, gone up to their room.

Dr. McCullough had wondered why the police had not come for him hours earlier than this—it was so simple to check the passenger lists of planes leaving Geneva—but he soon found out why. The maid Yvonne had not come to clean yesterday morning, so Roger Fane's body had not been discovered until six P.M. yesterday, when his office had become alarmed at his absence and sent someone around to his apartment to investigate.

"This is your brief case, I think," said the slender blond officer with a smile, opening a large paper bag he had been carrying under his arm.

"Yes, thank you very much. I realized today that I'd left it." The doctor took it and placed it on his lap.

The two Swiss watched him quietly.

"This is very shocking," Dr. McCullough said. "It's hard for me to realize." He was impatient for them to make their charge—if they were going to—and ask him to return to Geneva with them. They both seemed almost in awe of him.

"How well did you know Mr. Fane?" asked the other officer.

"Not too well. I've known him many years, but we were never close friends. I hadn't seen him in five years, I think." Dr. McCullough spoke steadily and in his usual tone.

"Mr. Fane was still fully dressed, so he had not gone to bed. You are sure you heard no disturbance that night?"

"I did not," the doctor answered for the second time. A silence. "Have you any clues as to who might have done it?"

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"Oh, yes, yes," the blond man said matter-of-factly. "We suspect the brother of the maid Yvonne. He was drunk that night and hasn't an alibi for the time of the crime. He and his sister live together and that night he went off with his sister's batch of keys—among which was the key to Mr. Fane's apartment. He didn't come back until nearly noon yesterday. Yvonne was worried about him, which is why she didn't go to Mr. Fane's apartment yesterday—that plus the fact she couldn't have got in. She tried to telephone at eight thirty yesterday morning to say she wouldn't be coming, but she got no answer. We've questioned the brother Anton. He's a ne'er-do-well." The officer shrugged.

Dr. McCullough remembered hearing the telephone ring at eight thirty. "But—what was the motive?"

"Oh—resentment. Robbery maybe if he'd been sober enough to find anything to take. He's a case for a psychiatrist or an alcoholic ward. Mr. Fane knew him, so he might have let him into the apartment, or he could have walked in, since he had the key. Yvonne said that Mr. Fane had been trying for months to get her to live apart from her brother. Her brother beats her and takes her money. Mr. Fane had spoken to the brother a couple of times, and it's on our record that Mr. Fane once had to call the police to get Anton out of the apartment when he came there looking for his sister. That incident happened at nine in the evening, an hour when his sister is never there. You see how off his head he is."

Dr. McCullough cleared his throat and asked, "Has Anton confessed?"

"Oh, the same as. Poor chap, I really don't think he knows what he's doing half the time. But at least in Switzerland there's no capital punishment. He'll have enough time to dry out in jail, all right." He glanced at his colleague and they both stood up. "Thank you very much, Dr. McCullough."

"You're very welcome," said the doctor. "Thank you for the brief case."

Dr. McCullough went upstairs with his brief case to his room.

"What did they say?" Lillian asked as he came in.

"They think the brother of the maid did it," said Dr. McCullough. "Fellow who's an alcoholic and who seems to have had it in for Roger. Some ne'er-do-well."

Frowning, he went into the bathroom to wash his hands. He suddenly detested himself, de-

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tested Lillian's long sigh, an "Ah-h" of relief.

"Thank God, thank God!" Lillian said. "Do you know what this would have meant if they'd—if they'd have accused *you?*" she asked in a softer voice, as if the walls had ears, and she came closer to the bathroom door.

"Certainly," Dr. McCullough said, and felt a burst of anger in his blood. "I'd have had a hell of a time proving I was innocent, since I was right there at the time."

"Exactly. You couldn't have proved you were innocent. Thank God for this Anton, whoever he is." Her small face glowed, her eyes twinkled. "A ne'er-do-well. Ha! He did us some good!" She laughed shrilly and turned on one heel.

"I don't see why you have to gloat," he said, drying his hands carefully. "It's a sad story."

"Sadder than if they'd blamed you? Don't be so—so altruistic, dear. Or rather, think of us. Husband kills old rival-in-love after—let's see—seventeen years, isn't it? And after eleven years of marriage to another woman. The torch still burns high. Do you think I'd like that?"

"Lillian, what're you talking about?" He came out of the bathroom scowling.

"You know exactly. You think I don't know you were in love with Margaret? *Still* are? You think I don't know you killed Roger?" Her gray eyes looked at him with a wild challenge. Her head was tipped to one side, her hands on her hips.

He felt tongue-tied, paralyzed. They stared at each other for perhaps fifteen seconds, while his mind moved tentatively over the abyss her words had just spread before him. He hadn't known that she still thought of Margaret. Of course she'd known about Margaret. But who had kept the story alive in her mind? Perhaps he had by his silence, the doctor realized. But the future was what mattered. Now she had something to hold over his head, something by which she could control him forever. "My dear, you are mistaken."

But Lillian with a toss of her head walked away, and the doctor knew he had not won.

Absolutely nothing was said about the matter the rest of the day. They lunched, spent a leisurely hour in the Vatican museum, but Dr. McCullough's mind was on things other than Michelangelo's paintings. He was going to go to Geneva and confess the thing, not for decency's sake or because his conscience bothered him, but because Lillian's attitude was insupportable. It was less support-

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able than a long stretch in prison.

He managed to get away long enough to make a telephone call at five P.M. There was a plane to Geneva at 7:20 P.M. At 6:15 P.M. he left their hotel room empty-handed and took a taxi to Ciampino Airport. He had his passport and Travelers Cheques.

He arrived in Geneva before eleven that evening and called the police. At first they were not willing to tell him the whereabouts of the man accused of murdering Roger Fane; but Dr. McCullough gave his name and said he had some important information, and then the Swiss police told him where Anton Carpeaux was being held. Dr. McCullough took a taxi to what seemed the outskirts of Geneva. It was a new white building, not at all like a prison.

Here he was greeted by one of the plainclothes officers who had come to see him, the blond one. "Dr. McCullough," he said with a faint smile. "You have some information, you say? I am afraid it is a little late."

"Oh? Why?"

"Anton Carpeaux has just killed himself—by bashing his head against the wall of his cell. Just twenty minutes ago." The man gave a hopeless shrug.

"Good God," Dr. McCullough said softly.

"But what was your information?"

The doctor hesitated. The words wouldn't come. And then he realized that it was cowardice and shame that kept him silent. He had never felt so worthless in his life, and he felt infinitely lower than the drunken ne'er-do-well who had killed himself. "I'd rather not. In this case—I mean—it's so all over, isn't it? It was something else against Anton—but what's the use now? It's bad enough—"

"Yes, I suppose so," said the Swiss.

"So—I'll say good night."

"Good night, Dr. McCullough."

Then the doctor walked on into the night, aimlessly. He felt a curious emptiness, a nothingness in himself that was not like any mood he had ever known. His plan for murder had succeeded, but it had dragged worse tragedies in its wake. Anton Carpeaux. And Lillian. In a strange way he had killed himself just as much as he had killed Roger Fane.

Half an hour later he stood on a formal bridge looking down at the black water of Lake Leman. He stared down a long while and imagined his body toppling over and over, striking the water with not

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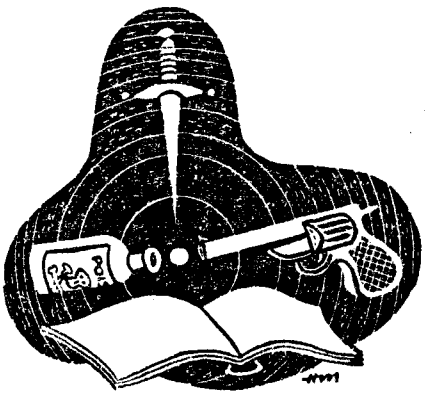
much of a splash, sinking. He stared hard at the blackness that looked so solid but would be so yielding, so willing to swallow him into death. But he hadn't even the courage or the despair for suicide.

One day, however, he would, he knew. One day when the planes of cowardice and courage met at the proper angle. And that day would be a surprise to him and to everyone else who knew him. Then his hands that gripped the stone parapet pushed him back, and the doctor walked on heavily. He would see about a hotel for tonight, and tomorrow arrange to get back to Rome.

He was now a dead man, a walking dead man.



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a NEW police procedural by

LAWRENCE TREAT

The Commissioner expected a riot in front of City Hall, so he alerted the whole Police Department, including the Homicide Squad. Well, maybe the Commissioner didn't mind having a riot on his hands, but Inspector Mitch Taylor had other ideas. So Mitch proceeded to have "compelling police business" that positively required his presence far from the scene of the anticipated trouble. But you know what they say: out of the frying pan into the fire . . .

R AS IN RIOT

by LAWRENCE TREAT

It was quite a day for Inspector Mitch Taylor of Homicide. First of all there was Mamie's birthday party, for which he'd promised Amy he'd be home by 5:15, before the party broke up and all the kids went home. While it meant cutting things pretty fine, Mitch was an expert at stuff like that.

Then in the second place there was this big demonstration set to go off in front of City Hall, and the whole Police Department was supposed to forget everything else so they'd be on call in case of a riot. And Mitch didn't exactly cotton to the idea of roughing up a bunch of hippies, no matter how mixed up their ideas were. Which in the third place he was no judge of. And besides, it could mean getting hit on the head with a rock or a beer bottle.

Lieutenant Decker read the order for the day at the morning briefing in the Squadroom. It said everybody was supposed to stick around unless there was "compelling police business" that required his presence elsewhere. So Mitch, who was pretty quick on the ball, piped up and said he had compelling police business elsewhere, that there was this arson case against the Ritter brothers, and if Mitch didn't get busy the

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case was liable to fall apart.

Decker said okay, get going, only come back in time. Mitch didn't ask in time for what. He just said sure, he'd do his best. Then Balenky said he had a compelling piece of police business, that he'd got this tip somebody was planning a holdup at a supermarket and he ought to be there, just in case. Then Small and Bankhart tried to dream up some compelling business of their own, only the Lieutenant told them it was no dice. Because if the entire Homicide Squad went off on emergencies and the dispatcher put in a call, Decker would look pretty sick, wouldn't he?

Mitch figured he ought to get going as soon as he could, which he did. So he was in good shape for at least a few hours. He'd go downtown and buy himself a couple of shirts that were on sale. After that he'd see Donovan again, on the Ritter case, just to make himself honest and get it down on paper that he'd questioned a witness about the arson business, like he said he had to. But after that—what?

He took the bus instead of driving downtown, mostly so they couldn't get in touch with him on the car radio. The way it turned out, the shirts were pretty cheesy and he didn't buy any, and he couldn't get hold of Donovan. So Mitch was stuck, and he figured he ought to produce. Because Decker had gone along with him, even though Decker was onto what Mitch was doing.

Still, Mitch had kind of a feeling that something might happen. What with the Commissioner announcing he'd have the whole police force alerted for riot duty, instead of patrolling as usual, it was an open invitation to the crooks to get busy. You could make book there'd be a minor crime wave today. The question was where to look for it.

For no particular reason Mitch was heading north, on Jeffers, when he saw these three bums across the street going in the same direction he was. But the thing was the way they walked.

Mitch knew one of them called Hoss, and so did half the police force. Because, while Hoss lived in Shantytown in a kind of hut that looked as if it would fall apart if you talked too loud, he was something special. He was kind of the mayor of Shantytown, and he had what Lieutenant Decker, one of those times when he was slinging language, had called "involuted charisma."

But forgetting all the big words, Hoss was quite a character. Once a month regular

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a big Cadillac with a uniformed chauffeur came down to the edge of Shantytown and this blonde dream got out. She was dressed like she was on her way to a couple of wedding receptions, but all she was after was to see Hoss, who was probably an old flame of hers.

Anyhow, he came out as if the doorman had just phoned to tell him his car was downstairs, and he always met her a few steps from that big limousine of hers. They never spoke, not a word. She just handed him a wad of bills, which it was reported came to exactly fifty dollars. Hoss always bowed low, like he was asking her for the next dance, and then they both turned around and went back, the blonde to her Cadillac and Hoss to the nearest liquor store.

The story was that Hoss used to be an actor and a movie director. Then he'd started with the booze, and he'd skidded all the way down to the bottom of the barrel with the rest of the rotten apples. But what hit Mitch right now was the way Hoss was walking, as if he had dough in his pockets and was late for a conference with his stockbroker. So Mitch made sure he wasn't noticed and then, staying on his own side of the street, he followed them.

The next thing he saw was a couple of more bums hotfooting it in the same direction. Which wasn't exactly according to Hoyle. On account mostly, if a bum showed up in this neighborhood of good stores that had jewelry and furs and stuff like that, the cops would tell him to beat it, or else. Only today—no police.

The Commissioner maybe didn't mind a riot because it would give him a chance to show his muscle. But right now, as Mitch got to the three hundred block, it looked as if he was going to have a riot of his own to break up. There was a whole bunch of Skid Row notables having some kind of an argument with a guy in a blue turtleneck. This guy had a movie camera set up on a tripod and he looked as if he might be having some kind of trouble. Then Hoss came along, walked up to Turtleneck, shook hands with him, and the two of them put their heads together like they were doping something out.

That gave Mitch his answer. Some movie director wanted to film a crowd scene and he'd hired Hoss to bring around his bunch of second-hand laundry. And Hoss, having once been a director himself, reacted like a punch-drunk fighter hearing the bell—he came out doing his thing.

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On account Mitch had nothing in particular to do except waste a little time he hung around. He figured he could tell his kids how he'd seen a movie get made. Only this one, the longer Mitch watched, the more he had a feeling it wasn't going to win any film prizes. Because nobody seemed to know exactly what to do. The bums—there were maybe twenty of them—started yowling and pushing each other around at a rate of around ten cents a push.

It went all right at first—you could tell this was a mob scene—but after a while everybody seemed to get a little tired out. A couple of the mob sat down to take a rest, and Hoss went over and yanked them up again, which didn't make for a realistic scene.

It kept on like that for eight or ten minutes, and what kind of a picture can get away with a crowd scene that long? It kind of petered out until nobody, not even Hoss, was doing much of anything. Then finally Turtleneck turned away from his camera, signaled with his arm, and yelled out that was all, they could quit. Which brought them crowding around him and reaching out their hands for their dough.

Turtleneck had sense enough to make them line up in single file, but even so a couple managed to sneak around to the back of the line and get paid double. And all the time Mitch stood there, not doing anything and not trying to think things out, just waiting around for something to happen. And for a while nothing did.

When the last guy had been paid off and the street was back to normal with just a few shoppers and passers-by around and all of them pretty well dressed, Mitch ambled over to Turtleneck.

"That was quite a scene you got," Mitch said.

Turtleneck shrugged. "Just run of the mill."

"Doing a picture?" Mitch asked.

Turtleneck nodded. "Sure."

"Who for?"

That got Turtleneck a little interested. "You're asking a lot of questions," he said.

"Any reason why you don't want to answer them?"

"Me?" Turtleneck said. "I'm busy, that's all."

"Got a license to use the public streets?" Mitch said, sounding official.

Turtleneck folded his tripod and picked up the case that his camera was in. Then he looked around, spotted a cab, and waved at it. He didn't answer Mitch's question until the taxi was alongside and the cabby

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had pushed the door open. Then Turtleneck spoke.

"Who are you?" he said. "What business is it of yours if I shoot a scene on the street?"

For answer Mitch took out his identification. Turtleneck scanned it indifferently.

"I haven't broken any law," he said. "I'm entitled to conduct my business wherever I want to." And he stepped into the cab.

Mitch noted down the license number and asked himself what he could have done with a guy who had violated no law or ordinance, who looked as if he knew his way around, and who had hired half of Shantytown at two bucks a head. Because, no matter what kind of a hunch you have, you can't arrest a guy for filming a bad mob scene. But the question still was, what was the guy really doing here?

Mitch got his answer a couple of minutes later when somebody came running out of the Emberry jewelry store.

"Police!" the guy yelled. "There's been a robbery—police!"

Mitch went into the store.

It seemed that the guy who'd come out yelling, his name was Crane and he'd gone in to buy a birthday present for his girl friend. But instead of getting waited on he'd found the owner, Emberry, lying on the floor tied up tight and the store clerk locked in a closet. Crane had untied Emberry, who told him to go out and get help. Luckily Mitch happened to be still hanging around outside.

He checked up on who Crane was and where he worked. Then Mitch called headquarters, got hold of Lieutenant Decker, and briefed him on the robbery. Only Mitch didn't mention, at least not yet, the part about the crowd scene and Turtleneck. All Mitch knew was that he'd been suckered. He'd watched the crowd scene which was probably just a blind while this robber did his stuff without worrying about getting interrupted.

Both Emberry and Robbins, his clerk, told the same story. A short stocky guy had walked in just before the mob scene had started outside. But as soon as the filming began, he'd pulled a gun. He'd locked Robbins in the closet and tied up Emberry, and then cleaned out the showcases and a small safe that happened to be open. After the robber had left, Emberry, who'd been trussed up and dragged to the rear of the store, had managed to roll himself forward. Around then Crane came in and saw him, untied him, and ran out yelling there'd been a robbery. Then Emberry

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had let his clerk out of the closet.

Except for the crowd business, there was nothing unusual about the robbery. Holdups like that happened all the time. What Mitch did, while he was waiting for Decker and the squad, was to call the cab company, give them the license number of the taxi that Turtleneck had taken, and ask them to have the driver report to the police as soon as he could. After that, Mitch concentrated on Emberry.

It seemed he couldn't give an exact estimate of what he'd lost, except to say it was plenty.

"Ten thousand?" Mitch asked.

Emberry shrugged. "More than that. Maybe twice as much."

"Insured?"

"Of course—jewelers have to be."

"This stickup guy—can you describe him?"

"Well, he was small, stocky, had brownish hair. His eyes—I'm not sure. Blue—brown—I couldn't exactly say."

"You said he came in the front door. How did he leave?"

"I didn't see, but he must have gone out the same way he came in, because the rear door's bolted on the inside."

"Let's have a look."

It was the sort of thing you checked up on, to make sure this wasn't an inside job. But the bolt was all the way over in a closed position, so nobody could have gone out that way.

What it came down to, then, was for Emberry to go through the files and pick out a picture of the stocky guy, while Mitch did the same thing looking for Turtleneck. Because if the pair of them were local, the Records Room would probably have their mugs and it would just be a matter of identifying them and then picking them up.

Right now, though, Mitch had the really tough job of explaining how, when he'd been right there on the scene just a few feet away from Emberry's store, he'd never caught onto what was happening.

The Lieutenant listened to Mitch's story without banging down on him. "This guy in the turtleneck," Decker said. "Ever see him before?"

"Not me," Mitch said.

"Better go down and talk to Hoss and any of the others who were there and see what you can find out. Take Balenky along with you. And Perk, too."

Nobody knew exactly why the police in the Eighth Precinct hadn't ever cleared out Shantytown, and nobody asked. It was low ground that had

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been flooded a few years ago, when the river had crested. There were a few buildings left, kind of leaning on cockeyed foundations that had been pretty much washed away. A lot of wreckage had been lying around, and the squatters had nailed stuff or tied it together to make a group of shacks. Mitch figured somebody down in City Hall owned the land and didn't want anybody to come in and stir things up on account there might be an investigation and it would turn out the area had been taken off the tax rolls.

Anyhow, the place was there, and a more or less permanent bunch of winos, bums, and assorted panhandlers managed to live there. A few transients came and left, after maybe they couldn't stand the smell of the place.

When the three cops got there they could hear noise down near the river, in what was left of a beat-up boathouse.

"Stewed to the gills by now," Balenky said. "A couple of bucks apiece, and they got prosperity."

"Till tomorrow," Perk added. "Just think of all those hangovers they're building up."

"Yeah," Mitch said. "We better talk to them before they all pass out. I'll take Hoss, the two of you see what you can get out of the rest of them."

Balenky pulled a cheap cigar out of his pocket and lit up. In the open air you could stand it, but even so, Mitch kind of pulled away.

"Trying to fumigate the place?" Mitch said.

"It gets me respect," Balenky said, grinning and showing his gold tooth. "A cigar like this, it would knock most people out."

Mitch and Perk agreed.

As the three of them approached what used to be the Star Yacht Club, they could hear the drunks letting loose inside. Somebody was singing out of tune, somebody else was banging away on a tin pan, and the rest of them were either yelling or stamping their feet. But in that funny way that guys like this have of smelling out a cop, the racket stopped the moment Mitch and his sidekicks stepped through the doorway.

Mitch spotted Hoss standing on a crate at the back of the room, and Mitch called out to him. "Hey, you, Hoss! Come on out here."

Hoss hammed it. "My name, sir, is not You. I am I, and you may address me by my full title."

"Can it," Mitch said. "Come on out."

Hoss had sense enough to obey, only he had to first make like Shakespeare. "Oh, defender

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of the rich and the mighty, I make obeisance and welcome a colloquy." And throwing his shoulders back as if he were wearing a brand-new suit instead of a collection of rags, he strode out.

He was a full head taller than Mitch, and anywhere else Mitch would have sat him down to kind of put him in his place. But out here the only way to cut him down to size was to tackle him head-on.

"Okay," Mitch said. "Let's have it. Who's the guy in the turtleneck?"

"I know not. He consulted me this morning and offered me and my cohorts adequate remuneration if we appeared in front of the Emberry jewelry store at ten thirty this morning. He stated that he wished to film a crowd scene for a major studio."

"Ever see him before?" Mitch asked.

Hoss drew himself up to his full height, which was a couple of inches over six feet. "If I had," Hoss said, "I would not have accepted his offer. His work is noxious. Abysmally so."

"You can say that again," Mitch remarked.

He asked a few more questions and got nowhere. Then Perk and Balenky came out and all three had pretty much the same to report. Namely, nothing. And as Mitch expected, Turtleneck's picture wasn't on file, and Emberry couldn't come up with anything, either.

Even the hackie lead petered out. All he had to say was, he'd taken Turtleneck to the corner of Adams and Lanier, where he got out. And what the guy did after that, the hackie didn't know, although Mitch could guess. Chances were that Turtleneck had waited until the cab was out of sight, and then the stocky holdup guy came along and picked him up. And off they went.

So, as usually happened with Mitch, nothing worked out. The only thing he could brag about doing that day was, he got home at 5:10, while Mamie's party was still going strong.

Next morning the papers buried the Emberry robbery on an inside page because the big news was how the Commissioner had prevented the riot by having the whole police force alerted. "But for that," he was quoted as saying, "the city would have been in for serious trouble."

But that was no skin off Mitch's ear. Let the Commissioner shoot his mouth off, that was fine, because it meant nobody was going to dig up the story of how a homicide man

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had stood outside a jewelry store and gone to sleep while a holdup took place inside. And the Lieutenant didn't want anybody to laugh at one of his men either, so that part was okay.

What bothered Mitch was, he'd been made a sucker out of—first by this guy in the turtleneck, then by Hoss. Because Mitch felt that somehow, somewhere, he'd missed out on something important.

"Give me a few days," he said to the Lieutenant. "Hoss got maybe five or ten bucks out of this, and he doesn't collect from this dame of his until the end of the month."

"So?"

"Wait till his dough runs out. Wait till his throat's dry. Then, for the price of maybe a bottle or two, he'll talk."

"He'll give you a fairy story that'll send you all the way to China," Decker said. He picked up a hunk of paper, rolled it into a ball, then sort of absent-mindedly heaved it at the stuffed crocodile on his bookcase. He missed by a good foot. "Our best bet," he said, "is to wait around until some of the jewelry gets fenced. Emberry was insured, the insurance company has a list of what was taken, they'll let us know if anything turns up."

"Yeah," Mitch said, which was about all he could say at the time. And maybe he would have gone along with the Lieutenant and forgotten the whole business, except he heard from one of his stoolies that he was being laughed at. The word got out how Hoss had made a monkey out of Mitch, and you can't let that kind of talk make the rounds. Because if it does, after a while the tips you rely on start to peter out, your batting average drops, and by and by where are you? Back on a patrolman's beat, and how you going to buy groceries on that?

So Mitch took to driving down towards Shantytown, kind of hoping he'd pick something up. But about all he found out was, Hoss was still on pretty good booze. Which meant he'd been paid plenty and for doing a lot more than delivering a few bums to make a crowd scene for a fake movie. So Mitch kept on going down to Shantytown and asking questions.

Mostly the bunch down there either clammed up or told him to beat it, and what could he do about that?

By the third time or so that Mitch was in the area and when he'd almost got used to the smell, he wandered into the old boathouse. Two guys in there were nailing a white sheet up on

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one of the walls, and here was this old buzzard watching them.

"What's this all about?" Mitch asked.

The buzzard's eyes gleamed. "Movies!" he said.

Mitch caught on then, but he asked a few more questions to pin it down. "What kind of movies?" he said.

"Us," was the answer. "Didn't you hear? We're movie stars and we're going to look at ourselves. We got a preview coming up."

"Who took a movie of you?" Mitch asked. "And where?"

"Hoss got us the jobs. In front of that jewelry store."

"Yeah," Mitch said. He stared at the white sheet and said, "Only clean thing that's been around here in years."

The buzzard broke into a kind of shrill laugh and called out to the pair who'd finished nailing up the sheet. "He insulted us!" he shrieked. "Cops—phooey! They come around here and think they own us. Get him out of here—throw him out—rip him up!"

The pair who'd been working on the sheet took up some kind of a chant, and the way it happens sometimes, the wrong idea got around so fast you couldn't stop it on account you didn't even know what it was. All of a sudden there was this gang at the doorway. Some of them had rocks and some of them had boards with rusty nails, and they were all yelling at Mitch.

"What did you beat him up for?" "Who got shot?" "Get him—beat him up!"

You get a dozen guys like that, you could handle a couple of them easy, but when they're ready to mob you, you got a problem on your hands. You could grab one of them, take away his plank, and slam your way out. You'd get banged up a little yourself and maybe you'd send a few of them to the hospital, and then there'd be a departmental trial and the papers would tell how a cop went and beat up some derelicts down in Shantytown, which would leave you at bat with nothing in your hands except a two-bit pinwheel. Or you could take out your gun and shoot at the ceiling and hope they'd quiet down, only instead you might start a full-scale riot. So what was left?

Mitch didn't exactly know how or why he did it, but somehow he backed himself up against the sheet and held up his hands for quiet, while he yelled out at the top of his voice. "Shut up, you guys!" he said. "I got something you better hear!" And all of a sudden they shut up, and there

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he was at one end of the room and they were letting him talk, and he knew damn well he'd better make it good.

"Look," he said. "All I want is a little information, so what's all the noise about? You tell me a couple of things and that's the end of it. And anytime the Mayor or the Commissioner"—the gang let out a couple of raspberries, just hearing the names—"anytime they want to chase you out of here, we say nix, you guys helped us out and you're going to stay put. You got civic pride, you like this place of yours, so how about it?"

Mitch thought it was a pretty fair spiel for a guy who hadn't exactly made a career out of public speaking, and for a few seconds it held them. What was more, it gave Mitch a chance to look around and spot the side exit. He figured he'd move over there and scram, and before they knew what was happening he'd be halfway across Shantytown.

Only what happened was, Hoss came through that side door. He had a cardboard box with him and it was about the right size to hold a movie reel. And with everybody looking at him Hoss spoke up in that clear, actor's voice of his.

"We have an intruder," he said. "Dispose of him." And with that about a half dozen of the bums came running at Mitch.

He reacted the only way he could. He took off like a fullback hitting the line, and with all the power he had he butted smack into Hoss. Hoss went sailing backwards, dropping his package, and Mitch scooped it up like it was a loose ball. And after that they couldn't catch him. Because here he was, a cop in pretty good shape, so what chance did a bunch of rummies have who sat around all day smoking butts they'd picked up on the sidewalk?

Back at headquarters he washed up and walked into Decker's office.

"Boss," he said, "I happened to run across the movie reel of that business in front of Emberry's."

"Brother!" the Lieutenant exclaimed.

He didn't ask any details of how Mitch happened to run across the thing. All he did was tell Mitch to go down the hall and get Art, in the photo room, to set up a screening. About fifteen minutes later the Lieutenant and Mitch and four of the Homicide boys who happened to be available were watching the movie.

Whoever took it was not only an amateur, but a pretty

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bad one, at that. The lighting was awful and the figures were blurred and half the stuff was out of focus. For the first couple of minutes there was just a bunch of guys milling around, but after that you got a fairly good shot of the jewelry store, and what hit you was, nobody went into the place. Either that, or he went in before the camera got going. Still, he had to come out.

Only he didn't. The bums kept staggering around like they were kindergarten kids who'd been told to wave their arms and move around, and didn't know why or what else they were supposed to do. Then, same as when Mitch had been watching them, they got tired and just sat down or else stood around and yawned. And that was the end.

Art flashed the lights on, and Decker said what they were all thinking. "He never came out. And I'm not sure he even went in."

"The back door was bolted on the inside when I got there," Mitch said. "It led to an alley, where anybody could have had a car and just walked out to it with the loot, and then driven off. Which means this was an inside job. Emberry let this stocky guy in from the back. Robbins the clerk never really saw where he came from. The stocky guy locked Robbins up in that closet, and then Emberry handed over the jewelry and let himself be tied up. After this Crane guy untied him and went out for help, Emberry must have bolted the back door, before he let his clerk out of the closet."

Decker nodded. "Perk, you and Bankhart get Emberry and bring him in. Taylor, get hold of Hoss."

They had Emberry cold, Mitch was sure of that, but he still couldn't figure out why Hoss was in the dough. Because it was pretty hard to believe Hoss had been in on the deal, which looked like a conspiracy to defraud the insurance company.

But Hoss gave him the answer, once Mitch told him they had the goods on Emberry.

"My minion of the law," Hoss said, "I asked myself time and oft how long it would take you to realize that this individual in the blue turtleneck sweater was an impostor. I was aware of it from the moment I saw his camera. A Minolta Super 8—no professional employs such equipment. And that knowledge was worth a number of certificates of the United States of America, each one attesting to its legal value to pay debts both public and

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private. And as for private debts, I assure you I have many."

"That's what you and him were jawing about before the ruckus started. You were trying to put the bite on him, huh?"

"As a man of intelligence, it was obvious to me that questionable doings were in the offing. I therefore assured myself of payment, as aforementioned, plus a camera for which he had no further use. It even contained the reel. And since I happened to know him by name he was forced to keep his end of the bargain." Hoss looked at Mitch as if Mitch didn't understand English. "And you, my good man, have proved yourself to be incompetent in your profession, indolent in the performance of your duty, and sadly bereft of basic intelligence. You should have, as did I, perceived the inchoate machinations of this nefarious enterprise."

Mitch didn't exactly understand all the words, but he got their drift. "Make you an accomplice before the fact," he said, taking out his handcuffs. "Let's go."

It wasn't front-page news when Mitch came in with Hoss, but still, Mitch figured he was doing pretty good and that Hoss had some valuable information. Only the Lieutenant wasn't around to give it to. In fact, nobody was around except Perk and Bankhart, who had brought Emberry in like they'd been told to.

It took a couple of hours before Decker showed up, along with Small. It seemed that a little after Mitch had left headquarters a pawnbroker had called up to say somebody'd brought in a couple of pieces of the Emberry loot. So Decker and Small hotfooted it down there.

It turned out that the guy who'd hocked the stuff answered to the description of Crane, and there was no trouble locating him, either. He was pretty much of an amateur, and he and Turtleneck, whose name was Foss, and the stocky guy whose monicker was Bridgewater, they'd cooked up the whole robbery scheme.

The way it went was, before the movie had even started, Bridgewater entered the store. As soon as the mob scene began, which would stop anybody from coming into the place, Bridgewater pulled the stickup. He simply unbolted the back door and walked out with the stuff. Later on Crane came in, untied Emberry, then bolted the back door before letting the clerk out of the closet. But once Crane was caught, an old

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hand like the Lieutenant had no trouble getting him to spill everything.

As for Mitch, it just went to show what he always knew—there's no sense trying to get smart and making work for yourself. Because, if he hadn't gone down to Shantytown and collared Hoss and got that film, he could have sat on his fanny and waited for the jewelry to show up at some pawnbroker's shop.

Still, you know what they say, you can't win 'em all.

A type of crime in Transylvania . . .

A TYPE OF CRIME

by EDWARD WELLEN

BANK ROBBER: Who'd have thought it would come to this? How the noble have fallen! But in this air-conditioned nightmare age, with its screens and locked windows, it gets harder and harder to find bedrooms I can steal into.

BANK EMPLOYEE: What kind of a guy would stick up the place, leave the cash box alone, and make off with all those pints of blood? Must be batty.

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It was just an ordinary bus ride—Alice Helms going home from a visit to her married daughter. But the freckled, button-eyed boy sitting next to Alice told her a story that turned the ride into a terror trip . . .

SHEEP TO THE SLAUGHTER

by DONALD OLSON

Alice Helms had had enough of children for the time being, having just spent three weeks with those adorable monsters, her grandchildren, and so chose to ignore the runty ten-year-old who slouched in the seat beside her. The visit had aggravated those symptoms of neurasthenia she had hoped it would cure, and so her mood was as dismal as these wooded hills the bus was passing through. Nor had she liked the southern town where Ralph, her son-in-law, had been reassigned; the visit had seemed as endless as this bus ride.

Two things happened to distract her: first, the bus stopped in the middle of nowhere to pick up a man with the reddest face she'd ever seen, and a mean-looking man to boot. A drinker, Alice decided. He slid into the seat directly behind the driver. Second, she became aware of an odd snuffling noise beside her, and looking down at her seat companion she found him knuckling tears from his eyes.

Now, she'd had quite enough of weepy children, but she wasn't as heartless as her expression might have suggested, or as many of her ex-pupils had chosen in the past to believe. She calmly drew a handkerchief from her purse and slipped it into the youngster's pudgy hand.

He took it matter-of-factly, wiped the tears away and gave the handkerchief back to her. His face, freckled, button-eyed, pale as old china, wore a look of almost comical despair. And she could feel him shaking.

"Are you ill, child?"

"No'm. Jist scared."

Alice's own face lost its cantakerous look. "What's your name, young man?"

"Tuck."

"Is that your first name?" She fished out a roll of peppermints. For her dyspepsia.

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"Yes'm. Tucker's my real name. They call me Tuck."

"Here then, Tuck. Have a peppermint."

"No, thankee, ma'm."

"Take one. You'll feel better."

She peeled one off and he slipped it into his mouth.

"Now tell me why you're scared, a big boy like you."

His lips, sucking the lozenge, quivered. "They're gonna swipe my daddy's watch."

She looked around. "Where is your daddy?"

"Home. But this here's his watch." He pulled out a big cheap pocket watch with such an exaggerated air of caution that Alice had to smile as she pretended to admire it.

"He give it to me to wear. So's I'd know when the bus was due and when I'd git home. He told me to guard it with my life."

"Which you seem to be doing."

"But they'll take it away from me. And Daddy'll think I lost it. He won't believe me about the men."

Alice wondered if the boy was quite all right. He *looked* perfectly normal. "Now who would want to take your watch from you, Tuck?"

His glass-clear blue eyes darted toward the front of the bus. "Those men."

"What men, dear?"

"One behind the driver. I don't know who the others are. I jist know they're on the bus."

Children and their fantasies. Alice took a sterner tack. "Why should any men on the bus want your watch? I'm sure they all have watches of their own."

His eyes seemed to strain for her attention. "Not jist my watch. Everything. I heard 'em talkin'. They didn't know I was there."

For the first time Alice got a vaguely disturbed feeling. She decided to take one of the peppermints herself.

"I'm afraid I don't understand, Tuck."

He leaned toward her and spoke in a tight-lipped whisper while keeping his eyes straight ahead. "I thought they was jokin'. I was layin' on the bench right behind 'em in the bus depot at Charity. They couldn't see me. I heard every single word they said. This one guy, he was tellin' the other what to do. The one that got on back there. He's supposed to tell the driver to stop the bus and get off jist the other side of the bridge. If he doesn't the driver's wife'll be hurt bad. Then this other guy's supposed to git on, dressed like the driver. At Witkop's Landing he'll pick up a guy dressed like a brakeman. The guy'll be carryin' a lunch

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box with a gun in it. There's two other guys already on the bus."

Alice patiently allowed him to finish.

"Then there was somethin' about a detour sign. They was gonna put up this phony detour sign and the bus would be driven up into the hills and stop at this old deserted roadhouse. That's where it's supposed to happen. My daddy'll be fit to be tied if I let 'em git his watch."

When he paused for breath Alice decided it was time to put a stop to this nonsense. "Now, Tuck, there isn't a chance in the world that's really going to happen. What did happen was this. You lay down on that bench and fell asleep. You dreamed all this. That's all."

He looked at her with puppylike appeal. "No'm. It weren't no dream. I was wide-awake."

"Little boys have a way of dropping off very suddenly."

"It weren't no dream."

"*Wasn't any* dream." She disapproved of obstinate children. Furthermore, she was offended when obviously intelligent young ones refused to listen. Reason seemed to be the last argument they would accept to explain anything.

"Yes'm. It wasn't any dream."

"Don't be stubborn, Tuck."

As a sign of reproof she turned her face away and looked out the window. Steeper hills were closing in on the highway—sunset streaks of purple and russet mottling the deeper greens and blues; the deciduous forest was giving way now to gloomier, denser pines. Soon it would be dark. She hoped the bus was on time. She thought of her sister Helen waiting for her at home.

Still, she could feel an itchy discomfort about the boy. Finally, in spite of herself, she looked at him again. "Just what was supposed to happen—in your dream—at the roadhouse?"

"It's gonna happen there, the man said."

"What's going to happen?"

"The robbery. They're gonna make us all get out and they're gonna steal all the money and stuff from all the passengers."

"You were *dreaming.*"

"No'm."

"Then you're lying to me. And you know what happens to little boys who tell lies." She gave him a directly challenging look. "Besides, if you heard all that why didn't you tell somebody? Or not get on the bus?"

"I didn't know they was talkin' about *this* bus."

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This innocent remark was the most eerily convincing of any he had made. There was an indisputable logic in the simple statement. With a child's animal selfishness he naturally wouldn't be concerned about any other bus, any other passengers. Alice's discomfort became stronger.

"I'm positive you were either dreaming or your imagination was working overtime." And who's being stubborn now, she thought.

"I guess I thought so, too. Till the fat man got on."

"You don't see him stopping the bus, do you? Or—"

She stopped, because that's precisely what was happening. The fat man had leaned toward the driver as if chatting with him. A moment later, with a little decelerating jerk, the bus slowed to a stop.

Tuck peered through the window. "Right over the bridge," he whispered.

Alice's heart began to thump like some heavy object rolling down a flight of stairs, and when she saw the driver open the door and get out and another man in a driver's uniform take his place, the rolling object seemed to reach the bottom of the stairs and stop.

Tuck's face, pinched and white, turned slowly toward hers. Neither said a word and yet a chemical change seemed to take place, a flowing together of thoughts and apprehensions.

The situation seemed as uncanny and alien to Alice as the stark pine forests and boulder-strewn hills the road was twisting through. She must keep a grip on herself, she thought. She mustn't let the child think she was afraid.

"Coincidence, Tuck. Nothing else."

"No matter if it gets writ up in the paper my Daddy won't believe it. He'll still think I lost the watch. It was Grandpa's."

Worried about a cheap old watch like that when she had a diamond wrist watch on her arm, the one they'd given her when she retired from teaching. And money. Over $200. And her mother's amethyst pin and earrings.

"Tell me again, Tuck. Tell me just what the man said."

Tuck went over the story once more, and this time it sounded chillingly logical. Planes were being hijacked every week. So were trucks. Why not a bus? So simple, really, out here in the wilderness.

Her eyes drifted over the passengers, some of whom looked affluent enough to tempt hijackers. For that

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matter, her money and jewels alone would make it worth their while. Was it possible they had somehow found out about her, knew she was carrying so much cash? In a nightmare anything was possible, and that's the way she was beginning to feel.

Oh, rubbish! Pull yourself together, Alice.

Reason speaking, but it was like whistling in the dark, and she knew it.

"Please, ma'm," came the small voice beside her. "What shall we do?"

"Nothing. Just put it out of your mind. Nothing is going to happen. You'll see."

"Yes'm." And then, pondering, "No'm."

Alice had not noticed until now that the bus was uncomfortably warm, and that she was perspiring, and she began to wonder—academically, of course—what one *could* do if one were ever truly placed in such desperate circumstances. Lean forward, perhaps, and try to enlist the help of that dark male head just visible over the back of the seat in front of her? And say what? How could she make him believe? The man would think she was crazy.

Or he might be one of them.

Outside, the trees were scarcely distinguishable from each other now, one solid dark umber wall beneath a slate-colored twilight sky. Ahead was the curving pattern of the white line in the road.

The bus seemed to stop suddenly this time, as if the new driver hadn't seen the person waiting to get on. Alice's hand seized Tuck's and held it fast, and she couldn't suppress a small gasp of panic as a burly figure in brakeman's clothes and cap swung aboard. He carried a lunch box and swept the bus with a proprietary grin as if calculating the precise amount of the haul.

Alice felt exactly as if the wind had been knocked out of her by a swift unexpected blow. No appealing to reason now. Reason lived in the well-lighted city streets of her secure, familiar life. Chaos, lawlessness, all that was strange and menacing and ordinarily remote waited outside this privateered bus, as dark as the surrounding wolf-ridden hills. Waited for her. *Her.* Alice Helms.

The man lurched down the aisle and took a seat somewhere behind them. Alice could feel his eyes watching her. She felt so helpless now, knowing they were trapped in the midst of enemies.

"Won't be long now," whispered Tuck.

"Tuck, listen to me. Tell me the truth now. Did they

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say—they didn't say they'd harm anyone?"

"No. Didn't say they wouldn't, neither."

In an oddly grownup manner he gave her hand a reassuring squeeze. "Don't be scared, ma'm."

Her last hope was shattered when she glimpsed, far down the road, the flickering of a red lantern. She made a sound like a frightened bird, and the boy said, "What's wrong?"

"Look."

He craned his neck to see. "The detour?"

"You were right—right about everything."

And though she knew it had been no dream now, a part of her still refused to accept it. Alice Helms had read about such things, always in a safe and warmly cozy place.

They were close enough now to make out the detour sign itself and a clumsily scrawled black arrow. No other vehicles were on the road. Alice had never felt so utterly helpless. Suppose she took a chance and spoke to the man in front of her?

What could he possibly do?

The bus was turning now, with a lumbering sway, rocking back and forth as it maneuvered upward onto the rough secondary road that seemed to wind in serpentine coils of broken macadam high into the mountainous hills.

She didn't for a moment believe the passengers would be left unharmed. She had watched enough crime shows on television and in the movies to know that criminals never leave witnesses who can identify them. She would have felt better if the hijackers were wearing masks or silk stockings over their faces.

The bus was hugging the mountainside; far below, tiny starlike lights could be picked out. How simple it would be for them to send the bus crashing down into the ravine with all the passengers inside! Not one would be likely to survive.

Alice groped for the roll of peppermints and crammed two of them into her mouth. She felt a wave of nausea coming over her.

Suddenly the small moist hand pressed hers.

"Listen!"

She bent toward him.

"I can run like the wind. Can you run fast?"

"Mercy, no. I can't run fast at all."

"If you could run I know we could get away."

"My dear child, I couldn't run away if the Devil himself was at my heels. My running days were over long ago."

"I could get away. I know I

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could. But I won't, not without you."

"Don't be silly, boy. If you can escape, you must. But I don't see how you can."

He looked up at her, as if gauging her behavior in a crisis. "Could you pretend to faint or something?"

Her mind was suddenly incapable of rational thought. She looked at him stupidly. He gave her arm a little shake. "You'll get off jist in front of me. You could pretend like you was faintin'. Sort of crumple up, you know? They wouldn't pay no attention to me. It's black as pitch out there. I could be gone like a shot and they'd never catch me."

The thought of his leaving her was somehow alarming, child though he was; she felt something akin to betrayal. "Don't be an idiot, boy. They have guns."

"It'll be dark. They won't see me. I can't let 'em get my daddy's watch."

She couldn't help a flash of anger. "Your daddy's watch! What about my watch? My amethysts? My money?"

"But I know where the main highway is. I could get help."

"It's too risky." She was sure he was as swift as he was small. If she helped him he very possibly might escape. As for fainting, she would hardly have to pretend—she was on the verge of it already.

"Look, a light!"

Dimly she made out the shadow of a sign by the road and beyond that the dark shape of a building. Except for her eyes and her throbbing heart the rest of her body seemed paralyzed. Earlier she was burning up; now she couldn't stop shivering.

At some point her will took charge. She squeezed the boy's arm till he winced. "Listen to me, Tuck. I *will* faint. And when I fall, you run. Run for your life. And don't stop. You sure you won't get lost?"

"Heck, no. Daddy and me, we've hunted in these hills loads of times. We're not that far from Preacher's Creek."

The bus was gliding to a stop now and they could see the white-lettered sign of the roadhouse to their left. Oh, dear, what if she fainted before the bus even stopped?

She watched Tuck thrust his precious timepiece deep into his pocket. She hurriedly tore off her pin, earrings, and wrist watch. "Here, Tuck. Take these." She opened her purse and took out the beaded wallet. "Is there room for all this?"

He buried them in his pockets without a word.

"You won't lose them now, will you?"

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"Oh, no'm."

"Send the police as quickly as you can. I'm depending on you, Tuck."

She felt a twinge of guilt, not sure if she was more concerned for her property or the boy's safety. But she couldn't let her jewelry and watch fall into the hands of thieves. She might never get them back. They could be miles away by the time the police arrived.

The bus stopped. Lights came on. The big driver stood up and swung around to face them.

"Comfort stop, folks. Ten minutes. No longer."

Weary of being jogged and jostled, the passengers groaned, stirred, and happily climbed out of their seats. They began moving toward the door. Like sheep to the slaughter, thought Alice.

She kept her hand pressed to her heart now as if to quiet its mad pounding. She moved forward, with Tuck right behind her.

She took a deep breath and held it. She stepped down, dodging the driver's arm as he pretended to assist her. She took a couple of steps forward, then shut her eyes tight and crumpled to the ground.

She expected the very worst—rough voices, curses, and a rude arm jerking her to her feet.

Instead, anxious consternation, kindly assistance.

"Y'all right, ma'm? Y' hadn't oughta let go my hand so fast."

She stared up at him idiotically. He was smiling, considerate. She looked around. The others, except for two or three of the more curious, were filing into the roadhouse, which obviously wasn't deserted at all. Shabby, yes, but not deserted.

"The detour," she murmured, feeling horribly alone and lightheaded. "He said—"

"You sure you're okay, missus?"

"That boy. He said you threatened the first driver. He said you were an impostor."

"Me, ma'm? I've been on the run ten years longer'n Brewster. We change shifts every night."

"The detour. That boy. He said it wasn't—real."

The driver had pulled his cap off and was scratching his head. "Heck no, it's real enough. Bridge is out at Preacher's Creek. Been takin' that detour for a month."

A sickening fear crept into her mind. She thought of her money, pin and earrings, her watch. "He took them," she cried out. "That boy! My watch, my money! Stop him!"

The driver's expression be-

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came guarded, and the passengers standing around were grinning uneasily. They didn't believe her! And there was something about the driver's face. The shape of the nose and set of the eyes. He looked like the boy! Her head was spinning. She tried to get up but couldn't.

She was a stranger to these people, an outsider. She even spoke differently. She sensed the strangeness of them, and she felt lost in a dark hostile world.

She started to cry because she knew the nightmare wasn't really over.

It had just begun.

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Was the ten-months-old baby stolen? Kidnaped? Or was the truth much stranger? . . . The first in a brand-new series about Petrella at Q. The next story in the series will be the case of a mysterious fire in a garage on Banting Street . . .

THE ELUSIVE BABY

by MICHAEL GILBERT

At the seaside a heat wave can be a blessing. But in August, in South London, and in Detective Chief Inspector Patrick Petrella's view, it was too much of a good thing.

"Arson, wife beating, and indecent exposure," he said to Detective Sergeant Blencowe. "Mostly the result of bad temper."

"Seasonal," said Blencowe. "Like shoplifting and cruelty to children. We get them at Christmas. You want to count your blessings. At least we aren't lumbered with—"

What wrongdoing they were not lumbered with will never be known, because at that moment the telephone in the C.I.D. room at Patton Street rang. Petrella picked up the telephone, listened for a moment, and said, "Damn and blast. All right, I'll be right over." And to Blencowe, "You'd better come with me. Someone's lifted a baby."

Baldwin Mansions was an old but not unattractive block of Council Flats, arranged round an open courtyard. The flats had tiny balconies, with low balustrades. Outside the entrance to staircase E a group of women was collected. The center of attention was a sobbing woman. Not unattractive, thought Petrella. Middle

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twenties. Light hair, and a sunburnt skin which was a contrast to the white cockney faces round her.

Constable Owers greeted Petrella's arrival with relief. "This is Mrs. Morgan," he said. "It's her baby boy. He was in the pram, on the balcony here." He indicated the perambulator, a new and rather expensive model, with a strip of material which acted as a sort of blind in front.

"I thought—I thought he was there," said the girl.

"You thought?"

"She means," said Owers, "that she usually keeps that sort of flap thing down in front. The child's very sensitive to sunlight."

"That's right," said one of the women. "Always down, that flap in front was."

Petrella detected a note of criticism in her voice. Maybe she was a fresh-air fiend. He said, "I suppose that means she can't tell us when he went."

"Nine o'clock she says she put him out," said Owers.

"That's right," said the girl. And she started to cry again.

Petrella was remembering all the things he now had to do. The routine was well established, but there was a lot of it. He said to Blencowe and Owers, "Start taking statements from all the women who live here. We want to know if anyone has been seen in this courtyard since nine o'clock. Any stranger. Particularly a strange woman. You know the form. I'll get back to the station and alert Central. I'll need a description of the baby. Can anyone give me that?"

He looked round the circle, which had fallen oddly silent. It was Owers, in the end, who said, "She gave me a sort of description. It was ten months old. Dressed in a white colored wraparound thing." Constable Owers was a bachelor.

Blencowe said, "He means a body binder."

"Black hair, quite a lot of it for a baby of that age. Blue eyes."

The girl stopped crying long enough to say, "He had his father's hair and eyes. He was the image of his father."

"That's enough to be going on with," said Petrella. He made his way back to the car which had brought him. As he was climbing in he noticed that one of the women had followed him.

"Excuse me for taking the liberty," the woman said, "but I'd like a word with you."

"Certainly," said Petrella. "Jump in the back, we can talk there."

The woman went on, "I don't want to make trouble,

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but the others thought I ought to have a word with you. Before you start anything."

Petrella said, "Yes," cautiously.

"It's like this. We don't think there is no baby at all, not really."

"What makes you think that?"

"That Mrs. Morgan, she's been here more'n a month now. And none of us haven't seen the baby." She added, with a depth of meaning which was not hidden from Petrella, "Nor we haven't *heard* it, neither."

Petrella, who knew something of the way life was lived in Council Flats, said, "I suppose it's possible. Some babies are a lot quieter than others."

"Another thing, she used to take it out in the pram, always with that flap down. Once, last week, Mrs. Crombie couldn't resist it no more. She said, I must have a peep at the little darling, and she lifted the flap."

The pause that ensued was clearly for dramatic effect.

Petrella obliged by saying, "What was inside?"

"Two packets of soap flakes and one of corn flakes."

"Soap flakes," said Petrella. "Washing. Surely you'd have noticed that."

"We've seen baby clothes. A pile of them hanging out to dry. But what we said was, baby clothes don't necessarily mean a baby."

The verdict of the jury of matrons was clear. And it was a verdict which put Petrella on the spot. He knew—none better—the necessity for speed when a baby was stolen. The whole of the Police of the Metropolis and the home counties needed the news. Hospitals, child-welfare organizations, children's clothing shops—many others had to be alerted. A warning had to go to all Registrars. And that most useful ally, the Press, had to be briefed. He also knew that if he set all this in motion and was being fooled, he was booked for something worse than a red face.

Back at Patton Street he got on the telephone and put his divisional boss, Superintendent Watterson, rapidly in the picture. Watterson said, "From what you tell me it seems to me we're onto a hiding either way." Some Superintendents would have said "you," not "we." It was one of the reasons Petrella liked working for Watterson.

Petrella said, "She's only been at Baldwin Mansions for a few weeks. The baby's ten months old."

"If it exists."

"What I thought I'd do is get

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the girl round here for questioning. That's natural enough in the circumstances, and it'll keep her away from the Press. I'll find out where she came from and get there quick. If there was a child, someone there *must* know about it."

"We'll hope it won't be the Outer Hebrides," said Watterson, who came from those parts himself. "All right. While you're doing that, I'll alert Central and start things moving. But I'll warn them to keep it out of the papers for the moment. Right?"

"Right," said Petrella. It was a relief to have some definite action ahead of him.

An hour later, as he sat in the front seat of the police car which Sergeant Blencowe was driving, he thought about the story the girl had told them. It was a simple one, and it could be true. Her husband, Evan Morgan, was a Chief Petty Officer in the Navy, and 20 years older than she. They'd been married for six years. During the first five years he had had a shore-based job at Chatham and they had lived in their caravan on a site near Cuxton on the Medway. A year ago two disasters hit them at the same time. The caravan site had been closed and her husband had been reassigned for service on an aircraft carrier, currently in the Indian Ocean. A local landowner, a retired Commander, had come to their rescue. It was his name and address that Petrella had scribbled on a piece of paper.

Commander Fanshawe opened the door to them himself. Petrella put him down as a man with money, who had left the service before retiring age to look after his property. When Petrella said, "I've come about a Mrs. Morgan. I believe she had a caravan on your land recently," the Commander stared at him, then burst out laughing and said, "That's right. Fancy you getting onto it so quick. I tucked it away, behind Long Shaw Copse. I didn't think anyone spotted it from first to last."

"That's what I want to talk about," said Petrella, and told him the story.

"It's funny you should think that," said the Commander. "It did occur to me, from time to time, that it was rather an elusive baby. I never saw it myself, and I couldn't swear anyone else did. Mind you, if she was fooling, she did it thoroughly. I saw baby clothes hung out to dry once or twice. And baby foods and stuff like that used to be delivered. I know that, because the tradespeople left the stuff here, and she collected it. They wouldn't go up to the caravan. She had a

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boxer she used to leave in charge when she went out. A short-tempered old girl—the dog, I mean. She took a piece out of my trousers once."

"Didn't Mrs. Morgan have any friends? People who called on her? You couldn't very easily hide a baby from someone actually in the caravan."

The Commander said, speaking slowly and rather reluctantly, "There was one. I don't know that you can blame the girl. Living all alone in a neck of the woods."

"Could I have his name?"

"He's a local farmer. I don't think I'm going to tell you his name. Sorry I brought it up. It was only gossip really."

"All right," said Petrella. "But let's clear up one point. Her husband was posted overseas in January last year. The baby's said to be ten months old. Was it soon after he left that she got friendly with this man, because if it was—"

"I can do sums as well as you," said the Commander. "Yes, it was immediately after the husband left. She was very lonely. After the child was born she seemed to lose interest in him—the man, I mean. Maybe the child was company enough for her."

"If the child existed."

"If the child existed," agreed the Commander. "One way you could have found out would have been to have a word with our district nurse. Only you can't. Six months ago she drove her car over a chalk pit in a snowstorm, on her way to a confinement. Tragic thing. However, you could try the Registrar at Chatham."

"I was planning to visit him next," said Petrella.

From Chatham, an hour later, he telephoned Superintendent Watterson. "We'd better back-pedal on this. No one here ever saw the baby. And no baby of that name was registered in the last six months of last year."

"I'll talk to Mrs. Morgan," said the Superintendent grimly.

When Petrella returned, Watterson said to him, "I've had a word with the lady. I talked to her like a Dutch uncle."

"Did she admit she'd been fooling everyone?"

"Not in so many words. I thought her denials were wearing a bit thin by the end. When I told her that until we had actual proof of the child's existence we weren't prepared to pursue the case, I thought she was pretty relieved, actually."

Petrella said, "I shan't be sorry, either. It isn't as though we hadn't got enough on our plates—"

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It was at this moment that Constable Owers came into the room. He placed the evening paper on the table, folding it ostentatiously so that the headline could be seen. It said: *WHERE'S THAT BABY?*

The police had been discreet. The inhabitants of Baldwin Mansions apparently less so.

The next 24 hours were ones Petrella would like to forget. It wasn't only the reporters, although they were bad enough. A missing baby is always a good story. A missing baby which might or might not exist was front-page stuff. It was when District started getting round his neck that Petrella began thinking about resignation.

Watterson did his best, but the head of Number 2 District at that time, Chief Superintendent Baylis, was a bit of an old woman. To do him justice, he was probably being prodded by Central.

On the afternoon of the second day, with the temperature in the middle nineties, Petrella put his cards flat on the table. He said, "We've got two alternatives. We can tell the world that we don't believe there ever was a baby. Or we can mount a search. I'd like to know which we're to do."

"So should I," said Watterson. "I put the matter that way to Baylis myself."

"What did he say?"

"He said that I was the man on the spot and therefore in the best position to make up my mind."

Petrella was on the point of saying something insubordinate when the Station Sergeant opened the door and ushered in a large, aggressive, red-headed man, who said, "What's all this cock and bull about Elsie Morgan not having a baby? Certainly she had a baby. I'm his father."

Petrella said, "Might we have your name?"

"Sam Turner."

"And you farm near Cuxton?"

"That's right. Someone been telling tales out of school?"

"The person who mentioned you was careful not to name anyone. He just said that someone had been friendly with Mrs. Morgan, after her husband was posted abroad—"

"Fair enough. I'm not denying anything. I was sorry for the poor kid. Dumped down in the middle of nowhere with nothing but sheep and cows to talk to. I'm not ashamed of what I did. These things happen." He added, with a grin, "That husband of hers had been trying for five years. Perhaps he hadn't got the knack."

Petrella thought there were few men whom he had disliked

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more on sight than Sam Turner. And he could understand and forgive Mrs. Morgan for getting tired of him. But his mind was preoccupied with much colder and less comfortable thoughts.

While he was working out this new line of speculation, Superintendent Watterson took over. "I take it you've actually seen this baby?"

"Seen it? Of course I've seen it! I've had it on my knee. Piddled on me more than once, messy little beggar."

"I meant, have you seen it recently?"

An odd look came into Sam Turner's eyes. He's caught on, thought Petrella.

"I haven't seen it up in London, if that's what you mean. Soon as I read the papers I came to have things out with Elsie. There was a bobby on the door. He wouldn't let me in. That's why I came round here."

"And this is the first time you've tried to see Mrs. Morgan since she left Cuxton?"

"Of course it's the first time. I didn't know where she was before, did I?"

"You mean she came up to London without telling you anything about it? That's rather odd, if you were the father of her child, isn't it?"

For the first time Turner looked uncomfortable. He said, "As a matter of fact, for the last few months, we weren't quite so friendly. It wasn't any of my doing—but that's the way it was. Now I want to see her, and the boy, and straighten it all out. I've got my rights."

"As things stand at the moment," said the Superintendent coldly, "you've got no rights at all. If you'll wait downstairs—the Sergeant will show you the way—I'll see what I can do for you."

When the door had closed behind them he said, "What's worrying you, Patrick?"

"It's something that's been bothering me all along," said Petrella. "And I'm afraid I've guessed the answer. *If she wanted to keep the baby hidden, why on earth did she come up to London?* As long as she was tucked away, in a caravan, on private property, guarded by a dog of uncertain temper, the thing was easy. In a Council Flat in London it must have been almost impossible."

"All right," said Watterson. "I can see you've worked it all out. You tell me."

"I think it was because she wanted to lose the baby convincingly before her husband came home. She couldn't stage-manage it in a field in the country. No one would have believed it."

"That's possible," said Watterson slowly. "But if she

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brought the baby up with her, where is it now?"

"She didn't bring it with her," said Petrella. "It's in a hole in the ground, somewhere in Kent." He added, "Sam Turner thinks so, too. I saw him thinking it."

There was a long silence.

"It makes sense," said Watterson at last. "We'd better alert the local talent. If she did it at the last moment before she came to London, the grave will still be fairly fresh. They've got instuments which register on freshly opened ground. They'd better get on with it." He didn't sound enthusiastic.

Petrella said, "I wonder if I ought to have a word with Mrs. Morgan first."

"We can't possibly charge her."

"*We* can't."

"What are you getting at?"

"I thought I might take Sam Turner round with me. He already suspects the truth. As soon as he sees the child isn't there, he's going to blow his top."

"Shock tactics?"

"It might work."

"I can't think of anything in Judges' Rules against it," said Watterson.

When Petrella arrived back at Baldwin Mansions he found the patient Constable Owers arguing with a thick-set, black-haired man wearing a dark blue suit and the unmistakable look of a sailor out of uniform.

"He says he's this lady's husband, sir."

"Of course I'm her husband," said the man in tones of deep exasperation. "Who the flaming hell d'you think I am? The Shah of Persia?"

"I expect you have some identity documents," said Petrella pacifically.

"It's a fine state of affairs if I need a ticket to get in to see my wife," said the man. He produced a paybook and other papers which identified him as Chief Petty Officer Evan Morgan. "I've spent fifteen flaming hours out of the last twenty in airplanes. Now I've got here, the police stop me seeing her."

"I think we'd all three better go in," said Petrella, with a glance at the onlookers who were lapping it up. It seemed hardly the time or the place to explain who Sam Turner was.

When Mrs. Morgan opened the door to them she took a startled look at the three men, threw her arms round her husband's neck, and burst into tears. Somehow they got themselves into the living room.

"What's all this, Else?" said her husband. "I saw a lot of stuff in the papers about our baby. The Navy flew me home

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straight away. Where'd they dream up all that story about it not really being there at all?"

"Of course it was there," said Turner, who had been steadily coming to a boil. "I told 'em that I've had it on my knee, more than once."

"And who the hell are you?"

"If you want the truth, you'd better have it. I'm his father."

There was a moment of paralyzed silence, and then Morgan moving with surprising speed for a man of his bulk had Turner by the throat. Turner grabbed Morgan's wrists and tried to pull them off. Then he changed his tactics and hit Morgan in the stomach. As Morgan dropped his hands, they broke apart and Petrella slipped between them.

They were both bigger and heavier than Petrella. But before they could start the fight again they were interrupted.

It was the thin cry of a baby, who has been awakened and is annoyed about it.

Mrs. Morgan darted from the room, and came back, carrying a fat sleepy-looking child. It had a surprising amount of hair for its age, and it was already quite undeniably russet, if not yet red-colored.

"Look at him," said Turner. "Look at his hair. Look at his eyes."

"My grandfather had red hair," said Morgan. "The child's a throwback to him."

Turner growled and sidled forward, but Petrella had had enough. He said, "If you start roughhousing again, I'll have you run in." He signaled from the window to Sergeant Blencowe, who came at the double.

"Take this man back to the car," Petrella said, "and keep him there."

Turner looked as if he wished to argue, but Sergeant Blencowe had played rugby for the London-Welsh, in the second row of the scrum, and very few people argued with him.

When Turner had gone, Petrella said to Morgan, "I want to talk to you. Alone."

"We could go in the kitchen."

As they were going, the baby, who had been regarding Chief Petty Officer Morgan with a fixed, if slightly unfocused stare, suddenly smiled and said, "Da."

"There," said Morgan. "You see. *He* knows."

It hardly seemed to Petrella to be conclusive evidence, but it cheered both the Morgans enormously.

Petrella said, "It's pretty clear, now, what happened. She was afraid you might disown the child."

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"Why should I do that? We've been trying for one for six years."

"Quite so," said Petrella. "But she wasn't sure you'd take such a sensible attitude. And there's no doubt she'd been a bit indiscreet with Turner."

"That red-headed scum. If he makes any trouble I'll fix him properly. Just tell me one thing. That child belongs to me. Right?"

"The child," said Petrella slowly, "quite definitely belongs to you. You're Mrs. Morgan's husband. It was born, I gather, ten months after you left England, but that's by no means exceptional."

"Right," said Chief Petty Officer Morgan. "That's all I wanted to know."

Petrella left the three of them together. They seemed to have arrived at a perfect understanding.

"I still don't understand what the hell she was playing at," said Superintendent Watterson.

"I think I do," said Petrella. "She was nervous that as soon as her husband saw the child he'd assume she'd been fooling around with Sam Turner. Which, of course, she had. She therefore decided to ditch the child. But she couldn't bring herself to hurt it. She staged what she thought would be a convincing child stealing here in London. *A black-haired, blue-eyed boy, remember?* Just like his dad.

"As soon as the fuss died down, I imagine she was going to deposit the child, warmly wrapped, on the steps of the Town Hall. No one would have associated it with her. What she underestimated was the newspaper coverage. It brought Sam Turner running."

"What she really underestimated," said Superintendent Watterson, "was her husband's ambition to have a child, and his grandfather's red hair."

"Q"

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Gimpy knew he had to have a perfect plan if he was going to see Mr. Big pay for what was done to Frankie, so he just sat there thinking and thinking and by the time he hit the sack that night he had himself a beaut . . .

THE HIT OF THE CENTURY

by ALAN K. YOUNG

I shot Nino Poppa.

Me, little Johnny Punchinella, a no-luck son of a gun who crawls through life on a bum leg, a pint-sized hunk who makes his livin hustlin tourists on street corners, a guy that everyone in town calls Gimpy but sure as hell nobody ever called Mister.

I shot Mr. Big.

I shot him on the Wharf right in front of Bandino's Restaurant with the tourists gawkin and the traffic slammin to a stop and the seagulls screamin their damned heads off. Almost a year ago that was but I can still see it like it was yesterday—the two old broads who'd just come outta Bandino's standin there with their mouths open ready to scream, and the old rummy with the Harbor Tours signboard hangin on his skinny neck gapin at us like he couldn't quite figure what was happenin, and the little guy in the mirror shades leanin on the open door of his car lookin like he sure could figure it but didn't want to believe it.

And Nino Poppa himself, top dog in every crummy racket in this town, with his silk suit and his dollar cigar and his pig eyes buggin outta his bald head as a .45 slug sliced into his buzzard's heart and slammed him straight to hell. You know I can even see the flash. It was bright sunlight, just a couple minutes after noon, but even so I can still see that flash.

Pretty soon now this lunch break'll be over and we'll all be called back into the courtroom and I'll be the first one on the stand. And then the D.A.'s gonna ask me if it was me that shot Nino Poppa and I'm gonna tell him yeah. And I'll be talkin proud, friend, you can bet on that cause I done it for Frankie.

You didn't know Frankie,

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did you? Well you'da never figured him for my kid brother, not in a million years. Me, I don't hardly make it to five three but Frankie was six feet easy, with curly black hair and a great build and teeth like a movie star. And Frankie always dressed like one of them dudes in the Playboy ads and he was always free with a buck too, Frankie was. I never once knew him to stop into Mother Murphy's or the Blue Room but what he'd stand one all around no matter how many of us was at the bar.

And broads? Man, I'm tellin you there ain't never been such a winner with the broads! Frankie coulda made out with just about any chick in this town, which is what makes it so stinkin that Nino Poppa shoulda had him put down over that snooty-nosed daughter of his.

Hell, before she got sent away to that finishin school Frankie'd never even looked at her twice, even though he naturally seen a lot of her, what with him bein Big Nino's chief lieutenant and number one hit-man. But that school turned her into wha'cha-call a real inscrutable broad, meanin you cannot tell from the stuck-up way she acts whether she will give him a tumble, and Frankie never could resist findin out about a broad like that.

Well Frankie found out all right and the answer was you bet your life she would and from then on it was her that was chasin him all over town. I tried tellin him that Big Nino wasn't about to let his daughter take up with no hood, but Frankie couldn't believe even a cold fish like Nino Poppa would put out a contract on his own man without warnin him off first.

But Big Nino must've known that once a chick was hooked on Frankie she stayed hooked and he must've figured there wasn't nothin for it but to have Frankie put down for good, cause that was what he done.

Frankie bought it on a Saturday night last July while he was comin outta Pinky's Pool and Pizza Emporium down on Monk Street—four slugs from a .45 that splattered Italian sausage and mozzarella and mushrooms all over Pinky's plate glass window. The three buck size with anchovies. Frankie always did go first class.

When I got the word over a beer at Mother Murphy's it was like somebody'd pounded me in the gut. But right away I knew who it was that had it done and I knew why and I knew I was gonna pay the sumbee back all the way to hell.

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I remember goin home that night to the room where I live in the Exposition Hotel on Dock Street and gettin out a .45 Frankie had left with me like he had done sometimes with his hardware to give it a chance to cool, and droppin it right in the middle of my bed and just sittin there starin at it, starin and thinkin. Not that I was plannin on usin it myself, you understand. Hell I'd never even owned one of them mothers let alone shot one off.

But I knew I was gonna have to have me a perfect plan if I was ever gonna see Mr. Big pay for what he done to Frankie, so I just sat there thinkin and thinkin and by the time I hit the sack that night I had me a beaut.

The toughest part was figurin out how to get the bread to pay for it. My way of makin a livin ain't exactly made me rich and spite of all the years I been workin the sidewalks of this burg, mostly the Wharf but sometimes uptown too, all I had stashed away was a little more'n 1500 bucks, which was just about half what I figured I was gonna need. Cause my plan depended on me hirin myself the deadliest shot in town and I knew whoever he was he wasn't gonna come cheap.

So the first part of my plan hadda do with how I was gonna stretch my 15 bills into enough to buy me the one hit-man I hadda have, and that part I put into action early Monday mornin by goin down to the Savings and Loan that was holdin my 1500 bucks and claimin as how I'd lost the little book they'd gimme to show what I got comin and askin em to gimme another one, which they done.

Then the next afternoon, after we'd laid Frankie away out at Holy Cross, I come back into town and stuck Frankie's .45 in my belt under my coat and went lookin for Nebby. I figured if anybody could tell me what I hadda know it would be Nebby, cause there ain't nothin doin in this town but what Nebby knows what and who and how they likes their steak and what's the color of their underwear. I finally found him where I oughta figured all along he'd be, in the back booth at the Blue Room broodin over a double.

"One question, Nebby," I says after settin him up another double and a draft for me.

But Nebby just shakes his head. "I'm sorry, Gimpy, but you ain't about to get no answers from me. Number one, I don't know who bumped Frankie. Number two, even if I did know, for your own sake I wouldn't tell you. And number

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three, even if I did know and did tell you, there ain't nothin you could do about it."

"That ain't what I'm gonna ask," I says. "Hell I already know the answer to that one. Not who pulled the trigger, maybe, but that I do not care about, seein as how it was no more'n a job of work for that guy, whoever he was, anymore'n it ever was for Frankie. But I know who bought the contract and that is the sumbee I am out to get and the reason for my question. Now that Frankie's gone, Nebby, who's the best hit-man in this town? And I mean best, friend. I ain't about to pay for no crummy also-run."

Nebby just stares at me. "You ain't thinkin of takin out a contract on Mr. Big?"

"You're readin me loud and clear, friend," I says.

"Well you're cruisin in dreamland, Gimpy. It would take at least twenty-five bills to buy a hit on Mr. Big, maybe even three G's. And where you gonna get that kinda bread?"

"You're forgettin somethin, Nebby," I says. "You're forgettin Frankie died wha'cha-call in a test state, meanin as how he didn't ever decide which of the many broads he'd been makin time with he was gonna make his legal missus. If any. Which I doubt. And that means all his scratch'll be comin to me as his legal half brother and only livin relative. And Frankie's been makin it big these past couple years." (Which weren't exactly true, seein as how Frankie spent money even faster'n he made it, but I figured it wouldn't hurt my plan none if word was to get around town that Gimpy Punchinella was all of a sudden loaded.) "So I'm askin you once more, Nebby, now that Frankie's gone who's the best hit-man in this town?"

"I'd be doin you no favor if I told you, Gimpy, believe me. You'd just end up gettin your own self killed is what you'd do."

"Okay, Nebby," I says openin my coat and leanin back in the booth so's he could see the .45, "then I'll just have to handle it some other way."

He let out a squeal like you'da thought I'd pinched him. "Gimpy, you ain't thinkin of goin after Mr. Big yourself?"

"That's just what I'm gonna do," I says, "seein as how you won't tell me who I oughta get to do it for me."

Nebby sighed and throwed up his hands. "Okay," he says, "but don't say I didn't warn you. But the best soldier in this town, bar none, is Georgie the Germ Walenti. There's even some that say he's better'n what Frankie was."

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"Yeah, and there's some that goes through life with their head on upside down," I says. "But thanks, Nebby. You been a friend."

"Of that," says Nebby, "I ain't so sure."

The next mornin, about ten o'clock, I got goin on the next step of my plan by latchin onto Mr. Nino Poppa just as he was comin outta Bruno's Barber Shop over on Water Street. And every day for the next eight days solid I shadowed that sumbee from mornin to night like you'da thought I was a yoyo on a string he was holdin. Northside, southside, uptown, downtown, in and out of that stuck-up suburb where he lived, back and forth from Fremont Park every afternoon the nags was runnin, I watched everywhere he went and everything he done.

Then after eight days I figured I knew as much as I needed to, so I knocked off tailin him and went back to the Savings and Loan that was holdin my money and used the new book they'd gimme to withdraw my 1500. Cause now I was ready for the Germ.

You want to see a character like the Germ you do not go lookin for him. Lookin for him makes him nervous, which he do not like to be. You want to see a character like the Germ, first you spread the word around town and then you just sit back and wait for him to find you. Which he done one slow Tuesday night three weeks later on the end stool at Mother Murphy's, just me and Mickey the bartender listenin to Ella on the juke and starin into our beer.

I didn't even see him come in, which ain't surprisin if you know the Germ. It ain't that he's so small though he ain't much taller'n me. It's just he's so overlookable. Anyways one minute he wasn't there and the next minute he was sittin on the stool next to mine and frownin across the bar at Mickey.

"You outta ice?" he says.

"No," says Mickey lookin sorta blank.

"What are you outta?" asks the Germ.

"Nothin," says Mickey, " 's far's I know."

"Okay, so you run down the cellar and find yourself a couple bottles of nothin. Georgie and his friend here wanna talk."

So Mickey, who maybe hasta have it spelled out for him once in a while, gets hisself lost and the Germ turns to me.

"Georgie's hysterical," he says lookin at me like I was a overripe oyster.

"Good to see you, Georgie," I says.

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"Georgie's laughin fit to die," he says, never twitchin a muscle.

"I can see that, Georgie," I says, "and what's more I'm bettin I can tell you why. You're laughin so hard cause you heard I was lookin for you to do a job of work and it has struck you funny a two-bit hustler like Gimpy Punchinella would figure he could meet the price of Georgie the Germ."

"And now you're gonna tell Georgie why he should stop laughin?"

"That's just what I'm gonna do, Georgie. First off, I understand your price is fifteen bills, right?"

"Wrong. Georgie has been known to work for that, but for the job he hears what you got in mind he'd have to have three big ones."

"I ain't surprised," I says. "cause the job'd be a big one for sure. Maybe too big, I'm thinkin."

"There ain't no job too big for Georgie the Germ providin the payoff is right."

"Okay then, Georgie," I says, "three grand it is. Half now and half after a certain old gentleman's been put down for good."

But the Germ shakes his head. "Georgie still don't think so. Right away after any job Georgie likes to take a vacation and he don't like to be delayed in his departure and he don't like to leave town with people owin him for his services. It's too easy they should forget they owe him, puttin him to the trouble of doin a job on them when he gets back."

"And you think I don't know that? Hell, Georgie, what'd be the sense of me havin a certain party paid back for what he done to my kid brother if I was to get myself bumped right after for welshin on the contract? You'll get your money. I ain't dumb enough to try crossin Georgie the Germ."

"Let us pray," says Georgie. "But if that is so, why can't you pay Georgie the full three G's before he goes to work?"

"Look, Georgie," I says, "we both know this ain't gonna be no ordinary job, so maybe you'll figure not to go through with it, and if you figure that maybe you'll figure to keep my bread anyways and just tell me to get lost and we both know if you do there ain't nothin I can do about it. So okay, I'm willin to risk fifteen bills, seein as how I always heard Georgie the Germ to be a man of his word, but I ain't willin to risk the whole three grand.

"But I'll tell ya what I will do. You tip me off to when and where you're gonna burn the sumbee so's I can be there to

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see it and I'll have the rest of the money with me. All you gotta do is tell me what corner to be standin on from where I can see the old bum get his and then where I can just toss the other fifteen bills through your car window when you come hightailin past afterwards on your way outta town and I'll be there with the bread, Georgie, you can bet your life on it."

"Your life, friend," says the Germ. "But Georgie still don't like it."

"Course you don't like it," I says. "Just thinkin about puttin down a big man like that'd be enough to scare hell outta anybody. But it'll be the hit of the century if you can pull it off, Georgie. Wha'cha-call yer pinochle of success, seein as how you can't hardly get no better'n eight aces in one deck."

And then I pulls out them 15 bills I'd withdrawn from the Savings and Loan and drops them on the bar right in front of his nose.

"There you go, Georgie," I says, "fifteen little beauties that Frankie left with me to hold in case he needed a stake in a hurry sometime, and this here"—and I pulls out my old savings account book which don't show no withdrawal seein as how I'd told 'em I'd lost it, and drops it on the bar in front of him—"is proof I got that much more in my own savings account that'll be all yours just as soon as Mr. Big ain't no longer with us."

And I keeps layin it on thick tellin the Germ how bumpin Big Nino's just gotta be the hit of the century and how everybody in town'll be lookin up to him and sure enough a couple minutes later my 15 bills disappeared into Georgie's pocket and I knew Mr. Nino Poppa'd soon be as cold as the mackerel hand the Germ gimme to shake on it.

The next night I was alone in Lansing's Cafeteria partakin of the Wednesday night special, meatloaf garni, when Nebby slides onto the chair opposite.

"Gimpy, friend," he says, "I got the miseries. Ever since I told you Georgie the Germ was the best hit-man in town now Frankie's gone, my conscience ain't gimme a moment's rest."

"You mean he ain't?" I says feelin my stomach do a flip.

"Oh he's the best all right, there ain't nobody in town'll tell you different. But you ain't got the chance of a cow at Hialeah of gettin him to put down Mr. Big for you. Odds are you even proposition him about it and he'll bump you instead."

"I already propositioned him," I says, "and he took the contract."

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"Oh my God!" says Nebby. "Now you're in for it. You gotta get yourself outta town before the Germ tells Mr. Big what you done. Elsewise you're a dead man, friend, you gotta believe me."

"The Germ ain't gonna tell Mr. Big nothin."

"But he will, Gimpy, for sure. That's what I been tryin to tell you—the Germ is Mr. Big's man now, he's taken over for Frankie. He even—dammit, I didn't want to tell you this but he's the one what bumped Frankie!"

"You think I don't know that?" I says. "Hell the minute you told me the Germ was the best hit-man in town after Frankie I knew it hadda be him that put Frankie down. Mr. Big would've known he hadda have the best for that job cause if there'd been any slipups Frankie would've come lookin for him for sure. Besides which nobody but the best would've stood a chance of catchin Frankie off guard that way and even then the Germ hadda be lucky."

Nebby was starin at me popeyed. "You mean you knew all along it was the Germ and you didn't care? You was willin to do business with Frankie's killer?"

"Care schmare," I says, "what's there to care? The Germ hit Frankie the same way Mickey Quinn'd draw you a beer or Sam Poltski'd sell you a paper. It was just a job of work for him. I don't think he even knew Frankie. Personal, I mean. So it ain't him I'm after, friend, it's that fat old man that laid the bread on him to do it."

"Mebbe so, Gimpy, but what's to keep the Germ from lettin Mr. Big know about this here contract and offerin to turn it around on you for another couple grand?"

"There ain't nothin to keep him," I says, "but I'm countin on that not happenin on account of the kinda guy the Germ is. What I mean, that guy loves his work—you got to, to be in a line of work like that—and a man that loves his work wants to be the best there is. So okay the Germ has already put down Mr. Big's right-hand man, so where does he go from there? He goes after Mr. Big himself, that's where he goes. Maybe it wouldn't've happened so soon if I didn give him a little push but sooner or later the Germ would've hadda go gunnin for Mr. Big. It's in the cards for a bum like that—wha'cha-call-yer many-fist destiny, meanin as how you gotta beat up on one helluva lotta punks to get there."

"All right, Gimpy," says Nebby, "I won't argue with

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you. But for God's sake, man"—and he squints at me sort of suspicious like—"that piece of artillery you had the other day, you ain't thinkin of tryin to put down Georgie the Germ the same time he is puttin down Mr. Big?"

"Don't be a fool," I says, never battin an eye. "I told you I don't give a damn about Georgie the Germ. It is Mr. Big hisself I mean to see in hell, which event I have arranged with the Germ. And now I'm just waitin to find out what day that sumbee's gonna get his."

Which same I found out a couple mornins later in a note delivered to me in the back booth at the Blue Room by Baggy O'Bannion, the well-known Southside wino. All it said was *Tumoro noon Therd and Water Sam Polsky's coerner Be ther with doe.*

But that was enough because right away I knew Georgie the Germ was figurin to put down Nino Poppa a couple minutes after twelve, when he was crossin the sidewalk in front of Bandino's Restaurant goin from his lunch to his car.

Knowin which was what come from my shadowin Big Nino them eight days I told you about earlier. Havin Frankie for a kid brother, see, I knew how a good hit-man works. Before he makes a hit he always follows his mark around for a couple days or maybe even weeks till he can spot some place where the guy's likely to be in the same place at the same time every day. That way he can look over the lie of the land and figure out just how he's gonna make his hit and then make himself scarce right after.

I figured the Germ, bein a pro like Frankie, 'd probably work the same way, and when he told me to be standin with the payoff at noon on Sam Poltski's corner, which is kitty-cornered across from Bandino's Restaurant, I knew I was right. Cause one thing I'd learned from shadowin Big Nino was that every day the ponies was runnin out at Fremont, the old bum had hisself a early lunch at Bandino's, always comin out from same a couple minutes after noon to get into a big black Caddy and be driven out to the track. And since it didn't figure the Germ would try to bump him in the restaurant or in the car it hadda be durin them couple seconds he was crossin the sidewalk.

Waitin for them next twenty four hours to be up was the longest waitin I ever done. I didn't hardly sleep a wink that night, and the next mornin I was up at six pacin back and forth in my room and goin over

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in my mind what I hadda do, cause I sure as hell didn't want no slipups.

By eleven o'clock I couldn't stand it no longer, so even though it wasn't more'n ten minutes to the Wharf I grabbed my hat and the rest of the stuff and lit out.

Sam Poltski's corner's always been a favorite of mine seein as how if tourists is scarce I can always kill time thumbin through the best collection of girlie magazines in town. But this particular mornin I didn't have no mind to spare for girlie books. I did hustle a couple tourists just in case the Germ were watchin from somewheres and might figure I was payin too much attention to Bandino's, but my heart wasn't in it.

At 11:51 I see the Germ come around the corner off of Dock Street and climb in behind the wheel of an old green Chevy that was two parkin meters down from Bandino's.

At 11:56 I seen Nino Poppa's Caddy pull up and double park in front of the restaurant.

Them next ten minutes drug by like they weren't never gonna end. I knew what I was gonna do and there wasn't no doubt in my mind I was gonna do it, but I sure as hell was wishin I'da already done it. I was just beginnin to wonder if maybe me and the Germ and Big Nino's driver hadn't all of us fouled up somehow and Big Nino wasn't in the restaurant after all when all of a sudden there he was, Mr. Big hisself, comin outta Bandino's with his white silk suit and his fat cigar and the diamond on his pinky glintin in the sun.

And then there was the Germ climbin outta his Chevy restin his right hand, the one holdin the .45, on top of the car door and bracin his wrist with his left hand.

And then there I was likewise gettin set to shoot, movin almost mechanical like in a dream, takin aim, feelin my finger tightenin on the trigger mechanism.

Then all of a sudden I seen the flash and heard the bang and there was Big Nino across the street goin down like a ton of white silk bricks and beside me Sam Poltski was gaspin and disappearin behind all them girlie magazines and somebody down the Wharf somewheres was already shoutin for a cop and then I hit the sidewalk myself and rolled in behind Sam's booth just as Georgie the Germ's Chevy come squealin around the corner, his face all white and pasty like behind the wheel, goin down Water Street

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and swingin into Beekman's Alley with his tires screechin louder even than the two old broads in front of Bandino's.

All of which the D.A.'ll be askin me about as soon as this here lunch break is over and I'm up there on the stand. I been in enough courts in my time to know how it'll go.

"Give us your name and address," he'll say, and I'll say as how I'm Johnny Punchinella, Exposition Hotel, this here city.

And then he'll say, "And did you, Mr. Punchinella, on the afternoon of August ten last, shoot Mr. Nino Poppa?"

And I'll say, "You bet your sweet life I shot him. I shot him at 1/500th of a second at f22 down there on the Wharf in front of Bandino's Restaurant with an old Rolleiflex with a Zeiss-Tessar 135mm. lens that takes as good a picture today as it did twenty two years ago when I first got into this here street photographer racket. I triggered it off with my flashgun just like I always do, even in bright sunlight, to fill in the shadows under all them tourist noses and eyebrows and hat brims so's they can have a real nice picture to show the folks back home in St. Louie or wherever.

"And I got that punk Georgie the Germ that's sittin over there at the defense table in my picture too, just when he was gunnin down poor old Mr. Poppa, God rest his sainted soul, a man that never did nobody no harm. And I know Georgie's been tellin you how it couldn't've been him cause he wasn't even in town that day, he says, but I'm here to say, your Honors, that pictures don't lie and sure as hell not a great big blowup like the one I brung to the D.A.'s office the day after the hit, the best damn photo I ever took in my life if I says it myself.

"And I know what with me testifyin against him like this, if the jury lets the bum go he'll probably come gunnin for me and I know even if they finds him guilty he'll probably start makin all kinds of crazy accusations against me, me bein the guy that is sendin him to the gas so to speak, but I am willin to take my chances on his crazy talk cause I am an upright citizen what is dead set on seein that murderin punk get wha'cha-call his just desert."

Meanin as how I maybe been a long time fixin it but it sure as hell's gonna be one sweet satisfyin revenge!

"Q"

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a *NEW* story of crime and detection by

MIRIAM ALLEN deFORD

In the course of many years—Miriam Allen deFord's first story in EQMM appeared in the March 1944 issue, nearly 30 years ago—Miss deFord has written many unusual stories of crime and detection. But none has been more unusual in theme than this, her newest story . . . which speaks volumes (libraries!) for Miss deFord's imaginativeness and staying powers . . . Fantasy? Science fiction? Don't you believe it! Truth is stranger than fiction ever will be—and you'd better believe it . . .

MURDER IN GREEN

by MIRIAM ALLEN deFORD

When Stacey Hunt, one of the graduate students at the university who doubled as assistants to Dr. Henry Dunn, was found dead, strangled, on the laboratory floor, it was obvious that it was an inside job. Nobody had keys except the staff. Nobody had lost or lent a key or had one stolen.

There was always a staff member, in rotation, on duty all night, to tend the night-blooming plants. Tuesday was Stacey Hunt's turn. And Wednesday morning the janitor found her when he came on duty.

Dr. Dunn's research project was not a constituent part of, but was loosely affiliated to, the Life Sciences Department of the university, and his laboratory was half a block from the campus. Nobody had heard any unusual sounds or noticed any suspicious persons.

The reason the university did not give credit for work with Dunn's plants—the staff members were paid by a grant from a private Foundation—was that the whole concept of inquiry into the emotional reactions of growing plants, measured by polygraph electrodes, was still scientifically unorthodox. But it was far from new. It was an outgrowth of the pioneer experiments by Cleve Bakster in

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1968, and long before that, in the 1920s, a botanist from India, a Dr. Bhose, had conducted cruder tests and had published his bizarre theory that plants, like animals, respond to aggression with fear or hostility, feel compassion for others in danger, and answer sympathy and affection with gratitude. Here was perhaps an explanation of the fabled "green thumb."

Bhose was laughed at and forgotten. But even back in the Nineteenth Century the English writer and social philosopher Edward Carpenter had written: "The cabbage shrieks when we pull it from the ground." He also said, "The strawberry begs to be plucked"; presumably he liked strawberries and didn't like cabbage.

Bakster had put the whole thing on a genuinely scientific basis. Not a botanist, but a polygraph expert, he accidentally discovered that when he was measuring the rate of water's progress from leaf to root, the polygraph chart indicated a definite reaction to a threat of violence—that is, to the bruising of a leaf. Amazed and skeptical, he began doing things, good and bad, to plants—and the Psycho-Galvanic Reflexes registered on the chart read just as similar emotions would be traced in an animal or a human being. Dunn was carrying on more extensively, and more intensively, in the same field.

There were no clues whatever to the murderer of Stacey Hunt. Dr. Dunn, shaken and appalled, wished heartily that the only witnesses, the plants that lined the room, could communicate as understandably as he was convinced they could feel.

And a sequence to that train of thought was inevitable. Since the killer must have been someone attached to the laboratory, how about a species of police lineup—having every member of the staff parade slowly past all the plants? He had hundreds of notations by now of plants that shrank and cowered, via the PGR, when approached by the callous or the violent. Perhaps the man or woman who had been able to choke the life out of a girl would exude an aura of cruelty that would panic the frightened plants.

There were, of course, two immediate objections. One was that nothing he could adduce would be considered evidence in any court on earth. The other was that some of his assistants had been deliberately chosen because they were *not* sympathetic, because they would just as soon crush a leaf or slash a stem as not. There

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could have been no proof of the plant-response theory if only benign responses were elicited.

But there was also an answer to these objections. All the laboratory employees had had ample proof that a brainless fuchsia or African violet does affect a polygraph record in exactly the same way a suspected human criminal under interrogation would affect it. And the murderer being patently one of the staff, the ordeal itself might arouse feelings of fright or guilt, at least enough to provide a tangible objective which could be given to the police to work on. With both "witnesses" and "suspects" attached to polygraphs, the faintest reaction to either could be traced and followed. Dunn decided to try the experiment.

Naturally there was no disagreement from any of the staff when he made his proposal: the killer would not want to make himself conspicuous. So the experiment was set up for the next day. As a necessary gesture Dunn himself made the first round.

To his consternation the plants that by their polygraph tracings had always expressed pleasure and—dare he say?—affection, now shrank from him in utter panic.

And the same thing happened with all the others, the innocent and the unknown guilty one alike.

Apparently the aura of murder still clung to every human being who approached the plants. Not only did the response furnish no hint of a clue, but the entire scientific project was threatened if the effect turned out to be permanent. Something must be done.

Dr. Dunn passed his vegetable guinea pigs in concentrated review. With all the staff dismissed, he approached each plant, armed only with a watering pot and a shaker of powdered fertilizer. He smiled, he crooned, he sent out mental waves of affection. There was no visible change in the plants, but their polygraph tracings remained wildly erratic.

He tried a new method. One by one he removed each plant to another room and tried again with each one individually. There was no change. The plants that had been his friends now feared him. He was one of the violent enemy—a human being.

He sighed deeply, closed the laboratory, and went home to think. For the first time since the project began, the plants were to have a whole night in solitude. He had given the night bloomers an extra ration to see

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them through for 24 hours, before he left them all to their privacy.

But he couldn't sleep, and finally at 2:30 A.M. he got up, dressed, and went back to the laboratory. Once there another idea occurred to him: Luke Pelham.

Luke Pelham was his most enthusiastic disciple. A brilliant young man working for his D.Sc. in botany, he had been an immediate volunteer. Most of the rest had to be convinced by argument and demonstration, or were just earning needed money.

Henry Dunn was Pelham's hero. Whenever there was dull or dirty work to be done, Dunn knew he could count on Luke. Often Luke came in before or after his working hours, just to be there. He had almost a telepathic affinity with the plants. To be sure, they were displaying fear of him now, as of all other humans, but it was appreciably less. If the Foundation continued the grant up to Dr. Dunn's retirement, Luke Pelham might well be his logical successor. True, he was high-strung and tense, but sensitivity was needed in this far-out delicate project.

So Dunn had no hesitation in phoning Luke at three o'clock in the morning and asking him to come in. Half asleep when he answered, Luke came wide-awake at a request for his services, and in half an hour he appeared, rumpled and unshaven but as bright-eyed as if it were six hours later. He cut through the doctor's apology with thanks for the opportunity.

"What can I do?" he asked.

"I'm going to try something new. I want you to stay just outside—my office will do, with the door open—and watch and listen to any comments I may make."

At night, it had suddenly occurred to him, all but the night-blooming plants may be said to be asleep. Plants could not dream—they had nothing to dream with—but at least they were quiescent and presumably their reactions would be softened. He moved all the night bloomers to a far side of the laboratory, then he hooked up the others, one at a time, to the polygraph and began to record their reactions to his presence.

To a certain extent it worked: the plants still revealed fear and distress, but markedly less actively than before. As he read each tracing he repeated it aloud to Luke.

He came in his slow progress to the big philodendron.

Its PGR had been definite: it was hostile. It was the biggest and burliest of the plants, and

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even in "sleep" it retraced its emotions. Anger, not fear—Dunn had come to know the difference. The other plants were frightened; the philodendron was angry. Dunn bent over to inspect it closely, its tough stems, its huge grotesquely shaped leaves.

Something caught his eye. He fetched a magnifying glass attached to a flashlight.

Caught in the angle of an inner branch was a microscopic bit of green fluff.

Stacey Hunt had been wearing a green sweater.

This was ridiculous. Vegetable life is immobile, except for growth. No plant could possibly reach out and fall back. Correction: no plant could reach out, strangle, and fall back.

"Luke!" he called. Luke came running.

He too, through the glass, saw the bit of green fluff. He stared at Dr. Dunn, his eyes wide. The doctor shook his head.

"No," he said, "that's impossible. But there's some connection."

"No," stammered Luke, meaning "yes." "What will you do?"

"As soon as it's light I'll call the detective sergeant who questioned us. This is a job for their forensic laboratory."

Luke looked agitated. "Won't they—"

"Laugh at us? Maybe. A lot of people have done that already and we've lived through it. But they'll have to do something about that wool. Just remember they're only technicians, not scientists. What time is it?"

"Five to five."

"I'll phone as soon as it's light. Do you want to go home and finish up your sleep?"

"I'd rather stay here."

"All right. You can bring back the night bloomers to their regular places; it's almost time for them to sleep, too."

The police didn't laugh. After all, Dr. Dunn was somebody important. If the detective sergeant, a wiry, gray-haired man near retirement, hid a grin when he entered, at least he hid it. And the bit of wool fiber was the first physical clue. He extracted it delicately and put it in an envelope. Needless to say, Dunn didn't mention any of his theories about emotional plants.

Yes, the detective reported that afternoon, the wool did come from Stacey Hunt's sweater. The next thing was to examine the philodendron still more carefully.

That was where Dr. Dunn balked. They wanted to take

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the plant to the forensic laboratory, but he wasn't having an already shocked plant turned into a nervous (even though nerveless) wreck. He could visualize them scraping its stems for faint traces of—what? A hair, a spot of blood, a thread from somebody's clothing? Whatever. Let them come here and frisk the philodendron to their satisfaction, but only in his presence and in its familiar surroundings.

Rather than tangle with this obstinate professor, the police reluctantly agreed. A technician appeared with his bag of instruments.

But at the first appearance of a knife Dunn put his foot down.

"No knives," he said positively. "All the magnifying glasses and light beams you want, but no knives."

The technician looked puzzled, as well he might. He made a remark about obstructing justice, which Dr. Dunn ignored.

The technician shrugged. He reached into his toolkit and took out a secateur.

Luke Pelham, who had been standing by, respectfully silent, turned pale.

"Wha-what are you doing?" he stammered.

"Since you won't let me take the plant to our laboratory," the technician said, "I'll have to remove this branch where the wool was caught and examine it properly in our laboratory."

"No!" Pelham cried, in the same agonized tone with which a mother would greet a suggestion that somebody amputate her baby's leg.

Dunn waved Pelham aside.

"If you must, you must," he said, frowning. "But let me anesthetize the plant first, as they do to trees that are being transplanted."

"No, Doctor, don't let him—please!" Pelham looked close to tears.

"That's enough, Luke," Dunn said sharply. "It would be too great a shock to uproot the philodendron and disentangle its stems and remove it to strange surroundings. But let's not forget that we're investigating the wanton murder of a human being, and one of your own colleagues. I'll take good care of the plant after its—well, let's call it its operation."

But Luke Pelham was beyond either reason or caution by now. His voice became a scream.

"It wanted me to help! It couldn't move—it couldn't defend itself—I had to give it its chance!"

The room became very still.

"Just what are you talking

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about?" Dr. Dunn inquired coldly.

"She was a brute! She was deliberately hurting a poor defenseless creature. She was baiting it—and enjoying being cruel. I watched her through the door for ten minutes. She stuck pins in it and made it bleed sap; she lit a match and set fire to a tender shoot. It couldn't move, it couldn't fight back."

The two stared at him, horrified. "She was chosen just because—" Dunn began. He could not go on. His best pupil—being groomed as his successor—and he failed to see the difference between a scientific experiment and a hysterical obsession.

"So," crowed Pelham triumphantly, "I loosened a big stem and wound it around her neck and pulled it tight. Tit for tat." He laughed. "Of course I had to tiptoe up behind her first and hit her so she'd stand still. Wasn't that fair? She'd been doing worse."

White to his lips, Henry Dunn grasped the slim young shoulder and held Pelham motionless. "Go to the phone and call the sergeant," he told the man from the forensic lab. Pelham tried to wriggle away, but Dunn's grip held the young man fast.

"Poor devil," the technician murmured as he went to phone. "Crazy as a loon, eh?"

"So it would seem." Dunn could speak no further. His project lay in ruins about him. The grant would be cut off, all the thought and labor wasted, all the work of all those young people, too. His arm was aching, but he held on desperately. An inspiration came to him.

"Do you think that philodendron *wanted* to be used as a killer?" he said in Pelham's ear. "Plants are peaceful. It was *you* who made it a murderer, and it's you, not Stacey or any of the rest of us, with whom it is so angry. You're a fool, Luke: you've misjudged the philodendron altogether."

Pelham twisted to look at Dunn with eyes that had ceased to see reality. "You mean—it *lied* to me?" he whispered pitifully. Then he collapsed. He grew limp and Dunn let him slip to the floor, where Pelham lay in a sobbing heap.

When they came for him he was only half conscious: they had no trouble strapping him into the strait jacket.

Alone at last, Henry Dunn dropped into a chair, shaking all over. After a while he forced himself to his feet and attached the polygraph to the big philodendron.

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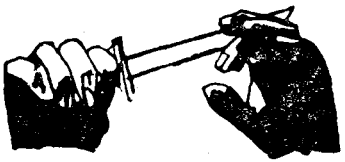
Its PGR showed pleasurable contentment. If a plant could purr, it would have been purring. Far from resenting being forced to kill, it had been highly pleased. Poor crazy Luke Pelham had been quite right in his interpretation. The philodendron's anger was at being frustrated from further revenge.

Doubtless plants did feel and show emotion. But the elucidation of their meaning was probably beyond the power of human beings to understand.

For the first time since he was ten years old, Henry Dunn broke down and wept.



NEXT MONTH...

13 NEW stories — including

EDWARD D. HOCH *(about Nick Velvet)*

ISAAC ASIMOV *(about the Black Widowers)*

ROBERT L. FISH *(about a man with nimble fingers)*

JAMES POWELL *(about The Shouting Bandit)*

JACOB HAY *(you have to read it to believe it!)*

J. J. MARRIC-JOHN CREASEY *(about Gideon)*

and 3 Honor Roll reprints by

AGATHA CHRISTIE *(about Tommy and Tuppence)*

EDMUND CRISPIN *(about a hired murderer)*

NORAH LOFTS *(about obscene phone calls)*

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a *NEW* Raffles story by

BARRY PEROWNE

It is 21 and one-half years since we published Barry Perowne's first short-story pastiche of E. W. Hornung's Raffles, the immortal cricketer-cracksman of Victorian England, and it is 17 years since the most recent Raffles story appeared in EQMM. So surely we can be forgiven, after all those years, if we repeat the account of the events that led to Mr. Perowne's assumption of the Hornung-Raffles double identity.

Barry Perowne first read Hornung's tales of Raffles when he was, at the tender age of eight, an inmate of Gosport Gaol. He had been living, in the absence of both his parents who were serving overseas in World War I, with a worthy couple residing in Portsmouth. The husband of the couple was a sparring partner of the British heavyweight champion, Joe Beckett, then in training for his fight with Georges Carpentier.

Well, one day young Perowne ran away from home and got as far as Lee-on-the-Solent, where he was picked up by a suspicious constable and led by the ear to Gosport Gaol. The lad-on-the-lam refused to divulge his name, so he was given bread and butter, a mug of cocoa, and some books to read, including Hesketh Prichard's DON Q and E. W. Hornung's RAFFLES. The boy sat up all night devouring RAFFLES, and perhaps, because of the unusually susceptible circumstances, the Hornung book made a lasting impression on his sensibilities. Before the night was out, young Perowne determined on a future career as a gentleman-burglar.

The next evening his pugilist guardian turned up, wearing his familiar checked hat and turtleneck sweater, his ears much eroded, and his Easter Island face embellished with criss-crosses of court-plaster. But the running-away brought an end to Barry's living with the fisticuff-man, and he was forced to say farewell to all the pictures of John L. Sullivan, Jess Willard, and Jack Johnson, and was sent to an uncle who owned a livery stable in town.

Now, near the livery stable was the old house where a struggling young doctor named A. Conan Doyle had written his first Sherlock Holmes story, and after hearing many anecdotes about the big hearty doctor, young Barry found

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himself torn between becoming a gentleman-crook and a gentleman-detective. (Curious coincidence, isn't it, that Doyle and Hornung were brothers-in-law?) Barry spent most of his time concealed in the stable, reading and rereading the adventures of Raffles and Holmes, finding it harder and harder to make up his mind. Finally he decided to become a writer, and through writing live both lives—for, vicariously, he could be both a cracksman and a criminologist.

Then later, when he was past 20 and already launched on his writing career, he went to live at an old inn in the New Forest. There he was taken to a fascinating house which he learned from the caretaker to be Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's. That gave him one of the greatest thrills of his life. Many a morning, as he sat writing in the old pub, he used to peer out through the leaded panes under the thatched and dripping eaves, and see a burly, now elderly, white-mustached man striding vigorously across the winter heath; and it seemed to Barry Perowne that the world was indeed full of bright wonder and queer chance and deep magic, and that the true wine of life was blue-black ink.

A few years later, in Majorca, he received a cable from a London editor, offering him a strange assignment. The editor had conceived the idea of reviving Raffles in modern form. Immediately, Barry Perowne's mind flew back to that night in Gosport Gaol, and it seemed to him that many old convergences—and wheels within wheels—had linked his life permanently with that dashing, chivalrous cracksman of old. Arrangements were quickly made with the Executors of the E. W. Hornung Estate, and Mr. Perowne began to resurrect Raffles and his worshipful amanuensis and chronicler, Bunny Manders. And as the years went by, Mr. Perowne wrote a million words about Raffles and Bunny, and enjoyed every one of them.

Then, out of the blue sky, the auctorial heir of Hornung received a suggestion from your Editor: Why not, we asked, resume the Raffles stories, not in modern dress as Mr. Perowne had been writing them, but as nearly as possible in the true Hornung period, with that aura of decadence and fin-de-siècle flavor which still hangs over the original Hornung tales? The reviver of Raffles, despite his now vast intimacy with the character, had misgivings. Could he really do it?—the authentic

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Raffles, with his flair and flash, with his hedonism and public-school spirit, with his nonchalance and his nerve?

Well, here it is: a reverent and reverie-like pastiche of the one and only Raffles. But Barry Perowne can't help wondering: Whatever is he going to say when, in the fullness of the hereafter, he finally meets Mr. Hornung?

RAFFLES AND THE POINT OF MORALITY

by BARRY PEROWNE

The best haircut in London was to be had at the St. James's Street establishment of S. Shilligan, where the names over the pigeonholes which held the clients' personal brushes and combs constituted a virtual *Who's Who* of the sporting and clubland life of the capital.

Among the pigeonholes was one marked *Mr. A. J. Raffles.*

My old school friend and occasional evil genius, Raffles, had used his influence with Shilligan on my behalf, with the result that, when I dropped in one winter morning for a trim, I had at last the pleasure of seeing, painted in discreet gilt lettering over one of the mahogany pigeonholes, my own name, *Mr. B. Manders.*

"Who was it, Bunny," said a familiar voice from behind me, "who remarked that to travel hopefully is better than to arrive?"

I turned from my gratified contemplation of the pigeonhole to meet the amused grey eyes of Raffles himself. Keen of face, his dark hair crisp, his tweeds immaculate, a pearl in his cravat, he was sitting in one of the saddlebag chairs, awaiting his turn for a trim.

"That chap said it," I replied, indicating a pigeonhole marked *Mr. R. L. Stevenson,* a client who was away in Samoa at the time. "Poetic license, of course. There's no truth in it."

I dropped into the chair beside Raffles and looked around for the proprietor, as I wished to thank him for the favour of my pigeonhole. Two of the three barber chairs had clients in them, but the chair usually presided over by S.

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Shilligan in person was unoccupied.

"Where's Mr. Shilligan this morning, Tom?" I asked the assistant busy at the nearest chair.

"He's stepped down the street to the Palace, Mr. Manders," said Tom Bidwell, a pleasant, middle-aged fellow, "to give H.R.H. a trim."

"A Command Performance?" said Raffles. "Won't H.R.H.'s valet feel hurt, Tom?"

"When it comes to a trim, Mr. Raffles," said Tom Bidwell, "H.R.H. swears by Mr. Shilligan."

A boy came in from the street just then, a sturdy lad about twelve years old, with apple cheeks as red as his woollen cap, muffler, and mittens.

"Did you get those razors, Jack?" asked Tom Bidwell.

"Yes, father," the boy replied, "to be ground and set, the gentleman said. And please, father, the Serpentine's frozen and chaps are sliding on it."

"All right, you can go sliding now," said Bidwell, "but watch out for thin ice, hear me?"

As the boy departed with joyous alacrity, the client in Bidwell's chair chuckled. "Likely lad you've got there, Tom. For a minute, seeing him in the mirror as he came in, I thought it was young Vernon Vyse-Halley, son of a man I know. They're much alike to look at."

Raffles asked, "Are you apprenticing Jack to your art and mystery, Tom?"

"Well, his school's just broken up for the Christmas holidays, so he's running an errand or two," Bidwell said. "I expect I'll have to apprentice him soon, but he's a bright boy and I'd keep him at school a few more years—and a better school than he's at now—if I could afford it."

"Education can be a problem," said Bidwell's client. "Take that Mr. Vyse-Halley I just mentioned. He'd like his boy to grow up with the earmark of a great school like Eton or Harrow on him, and heaven knows Vyse-Halley can afford it—he's a very rich man. But in making his pile, he's upset plenty of other people's applecarts. He's made enemies, Tom, so he's worried about his boy's safety. In a great school like Eton or Harrow, with five or six hundred other boys, what special protection would be possible? None. So he has to have his boy privately educated—keeps him at home, in charge of a stalwart tutor."

"We all have our problems, sir," said Bidwell sympathetically.

Raffles offered me a Sullivan from his cigarette-case. I no-

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ticed that he was looking thoughtful, and when, duly trimmed, we left Shilligan's together, he said, "Bunny, if you've no luncheon engagement today, be my guest. There's a man I'd like to have a word with, and we may find him at the Legbefore."

The Legbefore Club, which had a membership composed of cricketers, was not far off, and there we found the man Raffles was looking for just sitting down to lunch. He was a donnish-looking fellow in his thirties, gangling and pipe-smoking.

"Trevor runs a private school, Bunny, down in Somerset," said Raffles, when he had introduced us. "Mind if we share your table, Trevor?"

"Sit down," said the schoolmaster. "I'm told there's jugged venison on the menu."

"In that case," said Raffles, "I'll stand us a bottle of Beaune to go with it."

"Best news I've heard to-day," Trevor said. "I'm in London to make a round of the scholastic agencies to try to drum up a few new pupils, but I'm not having much luck."

"Yes, you told me you had a pupil problem, when I played cricket with you last summer," Raffles said. "Bunny, it's a shame. Knightswade Hall School's a lovely old place."

"It needs at least a hundred boarding pupils to pay its way," Trevor said ruefully. "Last term I was down to sixty. For next term—Spring term—I've got exactly forty-two."

"Then I may have good news for you," said Raffles. "Have you ever thought of offering parents a special attraction?"

"What kind of attraction?"

"Security," said Raffles. "Consider, Trevor, the number of wealthy parents there must be in this country who're having their boys 'privately educated.' Why? Because they want to? Certainly not. Most parents of means would far rather have their boys grow up at a famous school. Who in England can mistake, for example, an Old Etonian? He bears an inimitable earmark, the earmark that admits him by sight to the folds of the golden fleece—Society, Diplomacy, the Cabinet, the Bishoprics, the Peerage itself. Very well. Then what stops such parents from getting that priceless earmark for their boys? Simply this, Trevor—fear! They're parents who've made enemies—and who therefore feel they need special security for their sons."

" 'The sins,' " Trevor said thoughtfully, " 'of the fathers—' "

"Exactly," said Raffles. "And the great schools simply

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can't specialize in Security. But a school like yours could."

"Maybe," said the schoolmaster. "But look here, Raffles—all right, a school like mine, with few pupils—yes, we could make security pretty watertight. But what good would a run-of-the-mill boarding-school like mine be to parents who want for their boys the unique earmark of Eton, say, or Harrow?"

"Ah, that's the question," said Raffles. "I have an inkling of the answer, but it needs a certain amount of research. Let's say no more about it for the present. Here comes the Wine List."

As cover for my sometimes lucrative involvement in the clandestine side of A. J. Raffles's ostensibly leisured life, I dabbled in freelance journalism, and one rainy afternoon fairly early in the New Year I was in my Mount Street flat, trying to compose an article with the stylish Manders touch, when the doorbell suddenly jangled.

My heart lurched. Never, since my association with Raffles, had I known an easy conscience, and I opened my front door warily, to see standing on the landing an individual with a paunch, a brindled, square-cut beard, a German-looking hat and cape, and an aspect of bristling hostility.

"Herr Manders? Dr. Karl Eisner." He whipped from his cape a magazine, rolled up, and stabbed me in the chest with it. "This is *your* vork—this mendacious vork on Bavarian mountain sport?" Before I could answer, he swept me roughly to one side and strode into my living-room shouting, "*Schlim! Sehr schlim, Herr Manders! Pah!*"

He hurled the magazine into my wastepaper basket, and turned, taking off his hat from a brindled wig cut stiffly *en brosse*. "No offence, of course, Bunny," said Raffles.

I was so furious that I could have brained him, but he checked me with a peremptory flourish of his ribboned *pince-nez*.

"Later, Bunny," he said. "Here, take this visiting-card—a Press card in the name of Parker, Gilbert Parker."

"What do I need this for?" I said, bewildered.

"Credentials," said Raffles. "We have an appointment at five o'clock, near Cadogan Gardens—at the house of Mr. Victor Vyse-Halley."

"Vyse-Halley?" Into my mind flashed a memory of the conversation at S. Shilligan's. "Oh, dear God!" I said.

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I hated Raffles's way of catching me off guard like this, but he bustled me out and into a hansom, and as we jingled off through the waning light to Cadogan Gardens, he stroked his padded midriff and fluffed up his beard.

"I think I'll grow a real one," he said. "I'm getting used to them, Bunny. I was visiting orphanages over Christmas, playing Santa Claus, so I wore a white one then."

As he declined to enlarge upon this, let alone brief me as to his immediate intentions, my nerves were highly strung as a butler admitted us to the imposing, gaslit hall of the Vyse-Halley residence, spirited away our visiting-cards on a salver, and returned to conduct us into a handsome library and the presence of Mr. Victor Vyse-Halley, a smallish, sharp-featured man, immaculately dressed, with sleek black hair and ferrety eyes.

"I was expecting," he said, standing up behind an impressive desk, "only a Dr. Eisner."

Raffles, with a stiff bow, said, "Herr Parker is responsible for the publicity of Knightswade Hall School."

"Very well. Sit down." Vyse-Halley took up from the desk a letter to which, I saw, two photographs and some printed clippings were attached. "Dr. Eisner, I have your letter here. I require to know how you came by this photograph of my son Vernon."

"It vos taken," said Raffles, "unbeknownst to the boy and his tutor, as they vos setting off for a horse ride in Hyde Park."

"Then I consider it a damnable liberty!"

"It vos done, Herr Vyse, in order to provide you, in conjunction with that other photograph, vith a demonstration."

"H'm!" Vyse-Halley scowled at the two photographs. "Admittedly, there's a measure of resemblance here. Who *is* this other boy?"

I knew instantly it must be Tom Bidwell's boy, and I swallowed with a dry throat as Raffles said, "A mere nothing boy, Herr Vyse—offspring of a nobody father."

"H'm," said Vyse-Halley. "Now, Dr. Eisner, these clippings attached to your letter, these advertisements appearing in this week's scholastic journals—they describe Knightswade Hall as the only private school offering specialized security."

"In England, *ja.* In Bavaria, however, the prototype Eisner system school exists already." The savant put on his *pince-nez.* "It exists, Herr Vyse, in the interests of the sons of men of

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great enterprises—great industrialists, iron and steelmasters, barons of finance and armaments. Such men—powerful, vealthy—often have envious enemies. Such, alas, is the vay of the vorld! Hence, Herr Vyse, for the convenience of such great men, exists the Eisner system—as in my letter there confidentially explained."

"And you're now," said Vyse-Halley, "introducing your system into England?"

"In conjunction with the headmaster of Knightswade Hall School, *ja.*"

"I see," said Vyse-Halley. "And your proposal, as I understand it, is that I enter this—this nothing boy at Knightswade Hall School using the name of and as though he were in fact my son?"

"With due publicity given to that event, Herr Vyse—for vich purpose, as also to publish articles about the special security uniquely provided by Knightswade Hall School, the expert journalist, Herr Parker here, is retained. Thus, Herr Vyse, the attention of vould-be malefactors is misled to an impregnable school vhere they believe your boy is—"

"Though in fact," said Vyse-Halley, "I've really enrolled him at Eton, say, or Harrow, arranging with the school authorities there for him to be known by a pseudonym?"

"Incognito, *ja*, his true name to be disclosed only at his graduation, by vich time the earmark of the great school is, in perfect safety, indelibly stamped upon him."

"Extraordinary," said Vyse-Halley. "And the cost to myself of this—this decoy service?"

"Simply to underwrite a sound but undistinguished education for the understudy boy, Herr Vyse, by paying his board and tuition fees at Knightswade Hall School."

"And what do *you* get out of this—this Eisner system?" said Vyse-Halley, with a ferrety look.

"I get fee-paying pupils for Knightswade Hall School, in which I have a financial interest." The savant smiled. "Vun svallow, Herr Vyse, does not make a summer. So! Already I have arranged three similar combinations."

Suddenly, the sweat starting in my palms, I realised why Raffles had been visiting orphanages.

"So, Herr Vyse," he now continued, "vy not make a simple test? The Spring term at Knightswade Hall opens on Thursday next. Vy not, then, yourself personally deliver there this understudy boy—*as* your son Vernon?"

"Though actually," said

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Vyse-Halley, "keeping Vernon himself well guarded at home with his tutor?"

"For the present, *ja*. Then perhaps, by midsummer, if all goes smooth and vell at the high-security school, you vill have gained confidence in the Eisner system and feel able at last to enrol your son, incognito, at Eton or Harrow—to his great social advantage."

"H'm!" Vyse-Halley rubbed his chin thoughtfully, then opened a drawer of his desk and took out a box. "Would you gentlemen care for a cigar?"

The opening day of the Spring term found me, on Raffles's instructions, at Knightswade Hall School, a fine old Elizabethan house standing in some thirty acres of Somerset parkland surrounded by a high wall.

I had with me a Press photographer of my acquaintance, who duly photographed, on the school steps, an elegant Mrs. Paula Paradix, a Mr. Barrington Strang, a Sir Hume Crowe, and Mr. Victor Vyse-Halley in the act of parting from their alleged "sons."

As soon as the photographs appeared, in weekly journals devoted to the doings of prominent persons, I rushed copies round to Raffles's rooms in The Albany, just off Piccadilly.

"Well done, Bunny," he said, pleased with my efforts.

"Young Jack Bidwell and the three orphans were pretty bewildered," I told him.

"They'll soon settle down," Raffles said. "They're bright boys. I've guaranteed them five years, all found, at Knightswade Hall, the only condition being that they temporarily use the names I've specified. Tom Bidwell jumped at the offer. As for the three orphans, the orphanages concerned—which are supported by voluntary but meagre contributions—were glad to get rid of the boys.

"I had a hard time," I said, "urging Vyse-Halley, Crowe, and Barrington Strang to put a bit of warmth into their farewell hugs of their 'sons,' but Mrs. Paradix really threw herself into the part."

"So I see from this photograph," said Raffles, "but curb the lump in your throat, Bunny. She's an ex-actress—now the kept lady of a peer. She's brought many a man to bankruptcy, which is why she's afraid to send her boy, apple of her eye, to Eton or Harrow, much as she'd like to—at her peer's expense." He offered me a cigarette. "Don't worry, I've fixed it with Trevor that our boys'll be well guarded."

"Has Trevor no qualms about all this?"

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"In view of his financial difficulties," said Raffles, "he's content, in the main, to be guided by me."

"But what's in this for *us*, Raffles?" I said. "That's what I don't see."

"You will," said Raffles, "on April the First."

The date named, which was about halfway through the Spring term, turned out to be a typical first day of April, alternate sunshine and shower, and it found me once more, on Raffles's instructions, in the vicinity of Knightswade Hall School.

This time I was with Ivor Kern, the "fence" we did business with, a young-old man of melancholy aspect and cynical temperament. We had hired a closed carriage, which now, with its two horses, was standing stationary in a lane that skirted a part of the school wall remote from the house.

Ivor was sitting on the driving-box, holding the reins, and I was standing on the box in order to spy into the school park through the branches of a huge old oak on the other side of the wall. I was keeping my eye on a clump of trees in a hollow about a hundred yards off in the grassy park.

The horses stamped restlessly, tossing their heads with a jingle of harness, and Kern asked, "See anything yet, Manders?"

"A few deer browsing," I said, "that's all."

Almost as I spoke, the deer lifted their heads sharply, then began to trot away in alarm as a running man came into sight. It was Trevor, the gangling headmaster. Bareheaded, wearing the scanty, mud-spattered attire of a cross-country runner, he jogtrotted towards the hollow, occasionally scattering fragments of torn paper from a satchel he carried. He vanished into the hollow, reappeared on its far side, then passed from my view along a path hedged in by thickets of rhododendrons.

"Any minute now, Ivor," I warned.

Sure enough, after a brief interval, a running boy came into sight, following the paper trail. I recognised him at once as Tom Bidwell's boy Jack, alias Vernon Vyse-Halley. Sturdily jogging, Jack vanished into the hollow. He did not emerge from it.

Two other boys, strangers to me, came jogging into sight. They vanished into the hollow, emerged from it on the far side, and passed from view along the path through the rhododendrons.

Another boy came jogging into sight. I recognised him as the orphan who was under-

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studying Sir Hume Crowe's son, Sebastian. He jogged down into the hollow. He did not reappear from it.

A group of four boys now jogged into sight, vanished into the hollow, reappeared on its far side, and passed from view. Next appeared our other two orphans, the understudies to Barrington Strang, Jr., and Mrs. Paradix's boy, Peregrine. They jogged down into the hollow. They did not reappear.

A straggle of about eight boys came into sight, safely traversed the enigmatic hollow, and as the last of them was swallowed up by the rhododendrons, four furtive figures crept out of the hollow.

"Stand by, Ivor!" I said.

Bent double, Jack Bidwell and the three orphans darted towards the oak tree through whose branches I was spying. Climbing sounds came from the other side of the wall. The next moment four flushed, excited faces were looking down at me from the branches.

"Please, sir," panted Jack Bidwell, alias Vernon Vyse-Halley, "Dr. Eisner called to us. He was hiding in the trees in the hollow. He says this is an April Fool joke on Mr. Trevor."

"That's right," I said. "Come on, quick, I'll help you down from there."

"It's afternoon," said the "Sebastian Crowe" orphan doubtfully. "You can't do an April Fool after midday."

"Dr. Eisner says you can if it's a Leap Year," said the "Barrington Strang, Jr." orphan.

"And this is a Leap Year," I said, "so come on, let's see you leap off that wall. I'll catch you."

One by one I got the boys down from their perches.

"Mr. Trevor'll go berserk when he can't find us," said the "Peregrine Paradix" orphan.

"Dr. Eisner'll fix it for you," I said. "He has a pull with Mr. Trevor. Come on now, there's a change of clobber inside the carriage. Jump in and get those muddy togs off."

With the boys safely inside the carriage I resumed my seat beside Kern on the box.

"Where now, Manders?" he said.

"Taunton," I said. "And don't spare the horses!"

At Taunton I had booked snug diggings for the boys and arranged for a festive repast to be prepared for them by the motherly landlady. As soon as I had seen them settled, gloating, around a table groaning with delectable pastries, I left the boys in Kern's charge and headed for the station.

There was no sign of Raffles there, and I guessed he already

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had caught a train up to London. By nine P.M. I was back there myself and in my Mount Street flat, but was only on my second whisky-and-soda, sorely needed, when the door-bell jangled.

It was Raffles, in his Dr. Eisner guise.

"Come on, Bunny," he said. "The conference is at nine-thirty."

"Conference?" I said. "What conference?"

"On discovering the abduction of the boys," said Raffles, "the headmaster immediately dispatched his associate—myself, Dr. Eisner—to London, to consult with Mr. Vyse-Halley, Mrs. Paradix, Sir Hume Crowe, and Mr. Barrington Strang. I've just called on each of them, shown them the note, and explained the necessity of a conference. It's arranged for nine thirty, at Vyse-Halley's house. I've left the note with him—for study."

"Note?" I said. "What note is this?"

"The note that was found in the letter-box at the school, just after the paper-chase." Raffles adjusted his *pince-nez* on his nose. "The ransom note, Herr Parker!"

I saw the note the moment we were shown again, shortly after 9:30 P.M., into the Vyse-Halley library, for the ferrety financier brandished the missive at the savant.

"Not a penny!" Vyse-Halley shouted. "Not one penny, Eisner! This ransom demand is your problem, not ours!"

Already gathered here were the beautiful but notorious Mrs. Paradix, the dissolute Sir Hume Crowe, the portly Mr. Barrington Strang, and a youngish, monocled man of vacuous aspect whom I took to be Mrs. Paradix's tame peer.

"Your damned system's collapsed, Eisner," boomed Barrington Strang, "and it's up to *you* what's done about it!"

"Five thousand pounds demanded for each boy," said Vyse-Halley. "The money, in used currency notes of small denominations, to be placed in an attaché-case, and the case deposited at eleven thirty tomorrow night in the Left Luggage Office, Paddington Station. Instructions regarding the deposit receipt will be sent to the school later. On final collection of the ransom money the boys will be returned to the school."

"Twenty thousand pounds," said Sir Hume Crowe, "and it's for you and the school to find it, Eisner."

"Gentlemen," said the savant pathetically, "ve have no such money."

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"Well, that's too bad," said the exquisite Mrs. Paradix, "but your grubby little urchin boys are not *our* pigeon. *Our* boys are perfectly safe. It's not *our* boys who've been abducted—the abductors only think they are."

"If it vos your boys missing," said the savant sadly, "you vould pay the ransom, *nein?*"

Vyse-Halley said sharply, "That would be a totally different situation!"

The savant nodded, sighed heavily, adjusted his *pince-nez*, looked at me. "Vell, Herr Parker, it seems ve must go to the police—in vich case, vill it be possible to keep this matter from the newspapers, for the sake of Frau Paradix and the gentlemen?"

Before I could answer, Sir Hume Crowe barked, "*Our* sake? What d'you mean by that?"

"For your own boys," said the savant gloomily, "you vould pay the ransom, *ja, ja.* But for the poor understudy boys, whom you made use of for your own boys' benefit and who now are in danger as a result, you vealthy people vill not one penny pay, *nein, nein.*" He stood up. "Ah, vell, such is the vay of the world! Ve vill keep it from the newspapers—if possible. Come, Herr Parker."

We turned to the door.

"Wait!" said Vyse-Halley.

We turned back. Glances were passing among the plutocrats.

"Dr. Eisner," said Vyse-Halley, controlling himself with an obvious effort, "there are, perhaps, marginal issues to this damnable matter. Sit down."

The conference then really began. It was not an edifying session. Bitter remarks were hurled at the savant, who hung his humiliated head. But it was at last agreed by the angry plutocrats that, to avoid publicity highly damaging to their reputations, they had no option but to finance the release of the wretched understudy boys.

To this end Vyse-Halley, Sir Hume Crowe, and Mr. Barrington Strang would on the morrow each draw from his respective bank £5000 in currency notes, while Mrs. Paradix's £5000 would be provided by her peer.

The quintet, it was agreed, would foregather again next evening at 9:30, with their contributions, at the Vyse-Halley house. Vyse-Halley would himself deposit the £20,000 in an attaché-case at the Paddington Left Luggage Office at 11:30 P.M., as specified in the ransom note. Dr. Eisner would return to the school and, as soon as the abductors' instruc-

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tions regarding the Left Luggage receipt were received there, would forward them by special messenger to Vyse-Halley.

On conclusion of this arrangement we were coldly dismissed.

"So far, Bunny, so good," Raffles said, as we walked away through Cadogan Gardens. "By the Eisner system we've arranged for a known sum to be present at a known place at a known hour. Remains now to collect it by the Raffles system—subject only to one vital point."

"What point?" I asked, puzzled.

"A point," said Raffles, "of morality."

True to the Raffles system we effected an entrance, at a little before 9:30 the following evening, into the small back yard of the Vyse-Halley house. We found some narrow stone steps which led down to a basement area and a back door. This proved to be bolted, but there was a small window beside it. Forcing the catch of the window with an instrument he carried, Raffles opened the window, thrust in his head—silk-hatted, for we were in evening-dress—and struck a match.

"Excellent, Bunny," he reported, withdrawing his head. "It's a cellar with coal and wood in it and the usual taps of the gas- and water-mains. Vyse-Halley, as host, is of course already in the house—with his five thousand. Listen, I think I hear the second five thousand just coming."

I held my breath, listening. From round at the front of the house sounded a clip-clop and jingle as a carriage arrived.

"That makes ten thousand," said Raffles. "Shh! Listen!"

Again sounded an approaching clip-clop and jingle.

"Fifteen thousand," said Raffles. "Mrs. Paradix and her peer will come together, so there should be one more arrival."

Sure enough I heard again a clip-clop and jingle.

"Twenty thousand," said Raffles. "Right! In we go!"

As I clambered in cautiously after him through the small window, his gloved hand gripped mine and, in the pitch darkness, guided it to a tap.

"This is the tap of the gas-main," he whispered. "It turns to the right, for 'Off.' Stay here and don't let go of it."

"When do I turn it?" I whispered.

"That depends entirely on the point of morality I mentioned," Raffles said. "I'm

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now going to creep up through the house. Vyse-Halley and Company will almost certainly be in the library. I must contrive to overhear their conversation. If the point of morality goes against us, I'll rejoin you here and we depart empty-handed. On the other hand, if the point of morality justifies my doing so, I shall shout 'Off!' In that event, turn the tap firmly to the right, then depart as fast as you can go. I'll join you at Ivor Kern's place—all being well. Is that quite clear?"

"Perfectly," I assured him, my heart pounding.

He was gone, silent as a cat.

How long I stood there in the darkness, firmly gripping the gas-tap with a gloved hand, I hardly knew. My heart thumped. Would the butler be in his pantry, out of the way? Was Raffles, alone in the hall with its gas-globed chandelier, standing with an ear pressed to the door of the library? What was the point of morality he was so concerned with?

I swallowed with a parched throat. Suddenly I thought I heard steps in the basement passage. Some parlourmaid, perhaps, with a candlestick in her hand, coming to fill a coal-scuttle? And me here, black-masked and silk-hatted, at the gas-main—

Oh, dear God! I thought. What should I do when the poor girl, neat in her evening black, with starched white apron and cap, opened her eyes wide at sight of me, and her mouth wider to emit a piercing—

"Off!" shouted a voice from somewhere above, thin with distance.

For a moment of panic I wondered wildly if the shout were as much a figment of my imagination as the parlourmaid. I decided it could not have been. I quickly turned off the gas, scrambled out of the window, tore off my mask, raced across the back yard and along the tradesmen's entrance alley.

Gaining Cadogan Gardens, I was lucky enough to pick up a hansom almost at once and, within half an hour, reached the refuge of Ivor Kern's cluttered sitting-room over his antique shop in King's Road, Chelsea.

"Where's Raffles?" said Kern.

"Busy in the dark," I said. "For heaven's sake give me a drink!"

I had scarcely tossed off four fingers of Kern's brandy when the doorbell jangled. It was Raffles. Walking into the room, he tossed an attaché-case onto the table.

"An easy crib," he said. "I

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had the hall to myself, Bunny. Vyse-Halley and Company were in the library. I heard every word that was said. I was waiting to hear a certain suggestion that I felt pretty sure would be made. I fancied it would come from Vyse-Halley, but actually it came from the female of the species, Mrs. Paradix."

"What suggestion?" I said, breathless.

"The suggestion," said Raffles, "that they go to the police, tell their story, explain that they *had* produced and deposited at the Left Luggage Office the ransom for the release of the poor understudy boys—but had also set a trap for the abductors."

"A trap?" My scalp began to tingle.

"She suggested that they *mark the notes.* And the others agreed." Raffles smiled grimly. "Would they have risked marking the notes if it had been their *own* sons at stake? Would they?"

"Never!" I said.

"Exactly," said Raffles. "The point of morality! When they agreed to mark the notes, that was my cue—and my justification. So I shouted 'Off!' And the lights went out. And I went in. And in the darkness and confusion—"

He waved a hand at the currency notes, which Kern was examining through a microscope. "They aren't marked," Kern said.

"Thanks to Bunny's skilled hand at the gas-main," said Raffles. "And Vyse-Halley and Company won't go to the police now. They'll realise all too clearly that what Vyse-Halley called the 'marginal issues' would result in invidious newspaper comment and a lot of malicious gossip. That would destroy any hopes they may have of finding some means, ultimately, of getting their boys into Eton or Harrow. The governors of such schools are pretty particular." He lighted a Sullivan. "Our *proteges* can revert to their real names soon. Ivor, did you get the boys back to Knightswade Hall in good spirits?"

"They had no complaints," Kern said dryly.

"To-morrow," said Raffles, "telegrams will be received from the school by Vyse-Halley and Company, explaining that the boys have been traced and recovered, and no ransom need be paid. Of course, if in the meantime Vyse-Halley and Company have unfortunately lost the money through the chance incursion of an unknown burglar—well, one can but sympathise."

"Quite," I said.

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"Five years' board and tuition fees, paid in advance, for four boys, plus a modest endowment to put the school on a sounder footing," Raffles said, "will account for one half of that money."

"And the other half?" I asked, rather anxiously.

Raffles gave me such a droll glance that Kern laughed aloud in his cynical way, and I myself realised the foolishness of the question.

I looked at the sheaves of currency notes on the table, and drew in my breath, deeply.

"And all," I said, marvelling, "from a haircut at S. Shilligan's!"

"As to that, Bunny, nothing so becomes a man," said A. J. Raffles, reaching for the decanter, "as a neat trim."

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 388th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . It introduces young David Cloud, a full-blooded Menominee Indian—not a new type of detective, but still surprisingly rare in the light of our nation's history . . .

This "first story" is the work of two writers, O. G. Whitney and Lisa Proctor. At the time "In the Land of the Great Spirit" was written, Mrs. Whitney (B.A., University of Wisconsin) was in her early sixties. She has been, in chronological order, a high-school biology teacher, married and the mother of three daughters, and has worked for 20 years in a manufacturing mill (something to do with paper). When she retired in 1971 she began to write, "trying to find my bag—dabbling in humor, reminiscences, children's stories, and verse." Her collaboration with Mrs. Proctor, a life-long friend, was an attempt to pool their experiences and transform them to fiction.

Mrs. Proctor (M.A., University of Wisconsin) went to grade school with Mrs. Whitney. After not seeing each other for 40 years, they renewed their friendship at a meeting of the Fox Valley Writers and formed a "partnership in crime"—writing mystery stories jointly.

Mrs. Proctor is 65, a widow, with two married daughters, and a son at the University of Wisconsin. Her "greatest interests are the problems of Mexican-Americans and Chicanos, and the Menominee Indians." She enjoys water-coloring, reading suspense fiction, classifying historical buttons, and is attracted to islands, desolate landscapes, and the study of foreign languages.

Well, we have an inspiring and heart-warming team here, and it will be interesting to see what further mysteries these two ladies-in-larceny come up with . . .

"Q"

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IN THE LAND OF THE GREAT SPIRIT

by O. G. WHITNEY and LISA PROCTOR

Up in Menominee County the air of early spring hangs sweet with the spice of pine needles and the fresh rapids spill over flat silver rocks. The straight high spruce and bristling hemlocks, the clear streams and the placid lakes are just as they were a century ago. All but this one. Legend Lake is new, a manmade lake stuck in the middle of the forestland to satisfy the sport of white men.

I hated it, and the people around it. If I had my way it would be drained and the land would become wholly ours again. As it was in the beginning, with no poison fumes rising from oil burners to vapor the blue sky over the trees. Just the occasional wispy gray of Indian woodfire boiling down maple syrup.

But it is better now. The whine and growl of snowmobiles no longer menace hare and deer. Legend Lake is quiet again, quiet and brooding and peaceful. The cottage stands empty and soon the wilderness will take over.

It is hard to imagine that here, only a few short months ago—during the holidays, to be exact—three people lost their lives, two of them children.

I found them in their beds, cold and blue. Only the two others survived, and that barely. The coroner's jury brought in a verdict of accidental death by carbon-monoxide poisoning from a faulty furnace flue. Time passed and the horror receded, but sometimes I miss her, Sherry Blake, whose cloud of hair was so golden-light that it looked like dust rising from the hoofs of many horses, whose eyes were as blue and clear as mayflowers. I miss her and I shouldn't, for many reasons.

I am a full-blooded Menominee Indian, and she belonged to the race that squeezed us till our land shrank to this small reservation, and then they encroached even on that.

An artificial lake was formed, changing swampland and wildlife patterns, and lots were sold so that money from the land could pay taxes for new schools. But can one sell his mother? This land is our

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mother, and now the houses of the White Man spring up, like a fast and evil growth of toadstools. Because only the White Man can afford to buy houses here.

It was October when I first saw Sherry Blake. The Blakes were moving into their new home on Legend Lake. Sherry approached me in the Teepee Trading Post.

"I hear you guide on trails around here," she said. "I want to hire you. I'm in that new house on Legend."

"I know," I said.

She looked at me and grinned.

"You no like White Man come live here?"

I shrugged.

"Come on. You speak English. Or how did you get through Notre Dame? Yes, I know you're a college grad come back to save your people, Chief Stick-in-the-Mud!"

"My name is David Cloud," I said.

"Now you sound like a TV show. Okay, Dave, and I'm Mrs. Joe Blake, Sherry to you. The name's really Cheryl but I prefer the smoky amber liquid."

She was impossibly brash and infuriating, but it was as though in some subtle way she was rooting for my side. In the end I took her on the trails and gave her the jargon about flora and fauna and threw in a few popular legends. Like the battle of Indian Gods making cracks in the stones; the Spirit Rock which will stay as long as there are Indians; about Manitou, the Great Spirit who owns our land; all that. And sometimes I did odd jobs around the Blake cottage, too. There wasn't much for a law student to do up here, and during the slack season I wasn't needed at the Community Center.

The Blakes lived 150 miles south of here. This cottage was their vacation home. It was Thanksgiving when Sherry came looking for me again at the Post.

"Chief Stick-in-the-Mud," she said, "I want you to check my oil burner. I came up ahead of the family to get the house warmed up because the kids have been having colds. But I don't like the way the burner's acting. There's a sickening oily smell in the utility room that goes all through the house if you open the utility-room door."

"What do you expect, when you burn oil?" I said.

"It's not working right. Will you come over?"

"No problem. I'm just about through here. Wait a minute and I'll drive on up with you."

We talked a bit longer and I

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rode up with her. She was right, the tar was escaping and the cock was loose. I showed her what was the matter.

"And don't wiggle this valve," I said. "It'll send fumes all over the house and make you sick or worse."

She asked a lot of questions then, and I answered as well as I could.

"Your husband's a furnace man, why not take a course from him?"

"He's too busy to pass the time of day with me," Sherry said. "Fix that so I can twist the screw when I want to get rid of the family."

I stared at her. "That's murder!"

She burst into peals of laughter. "You really thought I meant it!"

I laughed with her. "Didn't you know an Indian was born without a sense of humor?"

We dropped it there. I saw her only occasionally after that. The last time was on the Saturday after Christmas. She phoned the Trading Post and asked if I would bring out some groceries. It was snowing hard but she knew I had a jeep. I didn't mind, and when I got there they invited me in to get warm.

"We've been having more furnace trouble but Joe's finally got the best of it and, anyway, there's a good fire going in the fireplace," Sherry said.

"Have a drink," Joe Blake invited. He and his brother Matt were playing pool in the far corner of the room. Sherry was in the kitchen section and the three-year-old twins, Jeri and Jody, were watching television.

Matt played a strange game. He circled the table on his toes like a prizefighter parrying thrusts. He was all nervous energy, like a drawn bow.

"No, thanks," I said about the drink, adding with a grin, "Injun no need firewater." But the truth was I never drank—nothing alcoholic, I mean. Simply because I didn't like the taste. Being Indian had nothing to do with it.

I sat down in the kitchen to warm up, not intending to stay long. I watched the two men play. Matt was Joe's younger brother and a bachelor. He was 26, tall, scarecrow-thin, but handsome. Too handsome. I'd think he'd have better things to do than spend his weekends buried in an isolated cabin with his brother's family. But he was strung tight as a violin string ready to snap, and I wondered if he were on drugs. Sherry handed me a cup of strong black coffee and then ran over to the pool table.

"You'd feel better if you stopped and had some coffee,

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too," she told Matt. "Your hand's trembling."

"I'm doing fine now!" Matt said, flashing an angry look at her. He aimed at the little white ball, and played. The cue slashed into the table, tearing the green felt and making a long three-cornered hole.

"Matt, for God's sake!" Joe Blake cried. "See what you've done! Do you know how much this table set me back?"

"Us, dear brother, *us!*" Matt said. "Remember I have a half interest in everything." He dropped his cue and it rolled to the corner of the table.

"I'm fed up with this game anyway. Fed up to here with everything else, too! It's Vietnam all over again—somebody bossing you around every waking minute. For Pete's sake, can't you leave me alone?"

He stalked over to the fireplace and flung himself into a chair. Sherry stood over him.

"Sorry, Matt. It was my fault for interrupting the game. I should have realized you were uptight."

"I am not uptight, as you put it! And I was well on the way to winning that game. Joe doesn't win at *everything*, you know. I've always been a better competitor than he is."

"Hear, hear!" said Joe. He was still trying to draw the tear in the felt together.

"We're boring poor Dave Cloud!" Sherry cried. "Don't quarrel. What'll he think of the White Man?"

Not any more or less than I do now, I thought to myself.

Being Indian in Menominee County is having a white man tell you all the "good" that Legend Lake is doing for us. It's having white people tell you how a bunch of "protesting" Indians ruined their summer. Being Indian is to see white men hunt and fish and boat on Indian land. Sometimes the hate inside me builds up until I'm scared. I'd be willing to see every white man destroy himself in his useless wars, and then when the nations of the world were no more, our lands would again be the land of the Great Spirit.

Sherry came back into the kitchen area. "Sometimes I don't understand Matt at all," she confided. "Once I was closer to him than to Joe. In fact, I was engaged to him before I married Joe, but now I don't understand his moods." She cut into a slab of chocolate cake, slid it onto a paper plate, and handed the plate to me.

"For the road," she said, and added, "Maybe it's all that jungle fighting that wrecks a man."

Jeri came over to us and begged for a piece of cake.

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Sherry cut her a slice and Jodi saw and ran after her twin sister. Jeri tripped and fell behind Matt's chair. He leaped up and sprang back, grimacing. Jeri picked herself up and Jodi swooped on the fallen cake like a small plump chickadee.

"Can't you keep these brats from horsing around!" Matt yelled. He slumped down again in his chair. "Damn it, won't this ever end?"

"Sooner than you think, little brother," said Joe.

"Come on, kids, bedtime. First one in gets to choose the bedtime story," said Sherry.

I excused myself and left. That was the last time I saw three of them alive.

It was Monday morning when a man came storming into the Trading Post. He had a business appointment with the Blake brothers at nine o'clock, he said, and couldn't rouse anyone in the cabin.

"Why the heck they slept so long when they knew I put myself out to get here—will someone call the Sheriff to go out and check?"

"I'll go, I'm a deputy," I said.

It had snowed again overnight, so I took the jeep. I had a funny feeling when I came in sight of the house. It was quiet, too quiet. Maybe they'd had a party last night, I thought, and were sleeping it off, but with three-year-olds around there's not much chance of that.

I tried the door; it was locked, as the man said. I looked in the window but saw nothing unusual.

Should I break in or wait a while? Why hadn't they kept an important appointment? I decided to force the door.

Inside it was cold and too quiet; I knew that right away.

Then I heard a small rustling and looked toward the bedroom. Sherry was bending over Jodi, forcing the child's arm into a snow jacket. She straightened and half ran, half stumbled toward me. She reminded me of a golden leopard, only her long hair needed a good brushing and hadn't been set. Her face was swollen and her eyes were bloodshot and staring. She collapsed in my arms and I carried her to a chair and poured her a glass of bourbon.

"They're dead, Dave! And I was the one who did it!"

I went into the bedroom. She was right. They were blue and dead. All but Matt. I threw open all the doors and windows and got Matt and Sherry out to fresh air. I summoned help and they were taken away, three to the morgue and two to the hospital.

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Matt Blake recovered. His physical makeup and the fact that his bedroom was at the far end of the house in a built-on wing probably accounted for his survival.

I went back to the cabin and looked around, in clothes closets, in drawers, for what I didn't know. In the small guest room to the rear a man's clothing lay tossed on a chair and the contents of his pockets flooded over the dresser in an untidy heap—a few coins, an open package of menthol cigarettes, an empty folder of matches reading *Bearskin Lodge—Good Food and Entertainment.* There was a black comb with two missing teeth and a set of car keys on a chain.

I saw a big old-fashioned raccoon coat, the kind that was stylish 40 years ago and is again today. I touched it. Did I imagine it? The bottom was damp. So what? I thought.

I went outside and looked around. No footprints, but there were small depressions leading from the back door. Hard to tell if they had been footprints. I followed them several yards to the edge of a pine grove where they stopped.

I was turning to go back to the house when farther on I noticed something odd. A spot where the snow had melted. Some half-burned twigs lay scattered about. Somebody had burned a fire here.

Had there been a prowler? No prowler would kill anyone with carbon monoxide, and back in my mind was the constant nagging suspicion that this may be murder. I thought of the wet coat. But Matt had been unconscious when I found him.

I went back to the house, took the car keys from the dresser, went out to the attached garage, and sat in the car to think. The Blake family car had been taken away. This was Matt's car and I assumed someone would be coming to get it, too.

The car was clean—no smudges on the windows; but there were some gum wrappers and a crumpled cigarette box half under the front seat. I glanced around, my mind on the damp fur coat and the fire that had been built in the pine grove.

It was cold out here, so I started the engine.

I sat there wondering if I could possibly be right. But Matt *had* been close to death—no denying that. I had sat there four or five minutes when the engine sputtered and died. That's funny, I thought, but I turned off the ignition and went back in the house. It was getting dark so I left, but

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still there was something in the back of my mind that wouldn't come out. Why couldn't I put my finger on it?

They treated Sherry for shock and released her. A check of hospital records showed that Matt had indeed been unconscious when admitted. An investigation turned up nothing suspicious. The deaths were recorded as accidental, from carbon-monoxide poisoning. It was brought out at the coroner's inquest that the family had been having trouble with the oil burner ever since its installation.

Sherry's remark that "I was the one who did it" was dismissed as the hysterical outburst of a distraught wife and mother. What wasn't mentioned was our conversation on Thanksgiving weekend when Sherry had asked me to look at the oil burner. Of course, she hadn't meant it when she told me "fix the furnace so I can twist the screw when I want to get rid of the family." She had told me she didn't mean it, so there was no use bringing it up at the inquest. But I still couldn't stop thinking about it.

Several weeks passed and one day I was in the town where the Blakes lived. I went around to call on Sherry.

"Look at the handsome bronze Hiawatha," Sherry cried, sounding a bit like her old brash self. "Come in and talk."

Of course I asked how she was, and how she was getting on alone.

"At first," Sherry said, "I blamed myself. I was having an affair with Dick Bailey. If I'd been home instead of sneaking over to see Dick after Joe was asleep, perhaps I could have saved them. But I'd had too much to drink and I got back too late. Or maybe I'd have died, too. But now I don't feel so bad since the doctor told me Joe had an incurable disease, something hereditary. Poor devil, he probably was desperate enough to want out."

"Then you didn't—"

She stared at me. "Did you really think I did?"

"Well—"

"For that matter, *you* could have. You hate us all. It would be one way of getting us off the land."

"Not a chance. The White Man's taken enough without putting me in jail for the rest of my life. Frankly, you're not worth giving up my freedom."

"Have you heard that Matt moved into a swanky five-room apartment?" she asked. "Maybe he'll be happier now, with the money he got on Joe's death."

She gave me his address and I went around to see him. Matt

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asked me in. When he went to fix a drink at the handsome walnut bar in the corner of the room I glanced around. The door to a closet was open and I caught a glimpse of the raccoon coat I had seen at the cottage.

"Did you ever find out what really caused the deaths at the cabin?" I asked.

Matt went over the story with me. "I came to," he said, "as I was put on a stretcher to go to the hospital. Then I blacked out again and the next thing I knew I was there." He pressed his long hair with the palm of his hand. A big signet ring flashed in the light from the window.

"It was quite a while before they told me about Joe and the kids," he added.

His eyes had that look in them—not so much haunted as an everpresent contemplation of something awe-inspiring and terrible. I took a sneak shot at him.

"Did you say you lost family funds in the stock market?"

"They were amply covered in the insurance."

I glanced again over the apartment.

"Yes," Matt said, reading my thoughts. "I cashed in my share of the business. There's nothing odd about me getting the money. I'm the only member of the Blake family left and my father left everything to Joe and me."

"Perhaps you can clear up some points I've been puzzling over," I said. "Was there a prowler around at any time? Did anyone miss anything?"

He assured me that wasn't the case but his eyes had a guarded look. "Why?"

I brought up the fur coat. "So that belongs to you. I noticed it at the cabin," I said. "It's quite a conversation piece."

He laughed. "A genuine antique from old college days. It's been in mothballs for years—belonged to my Dad when he went to UW, but now it's in style again. And practical, too."

I remembered the damp bottom of the coat. I thought of the spot in the grove of trees where a fire had been built. It still didn't add up to me. Finally I said goodbye and went to my car. I stepped on the starter and glanced at the gas gauge. It was nearly empty.

Then it hit me.

It wasn't the furnace at all! It wasn't the faulty furnace that killed those three!

I went back to Matt's apartment. He was surprised to see me again but he let me in.

"How far is it to the cabin from here, would you say?" I asked.

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"About a hundred and fifty miles. Why?"

"That afternoon after you were taken to the hospital, I went back to the cabin to look around. Your car was still there and I went out to the garage and sat in it. I started the motor to keep warm and in less than five minutes it stopped. The car was out of gas. Can you explain why, with the weather so bad and a possibility of trouble on the road, you put only enough gas in your car to make the trip one way?"

I had caught him by surprise. "You see, I know now how you did it. After everyone was asleep you went out and started your car. The garage is attached to the house and a vent in the wall between the house and the garage could permit the fumes to enter. Before all the gas in the car was used up, there was enough carbon monoxide in the house to kill everyone."

"Then why didn't it kill me? Who would be fool enough to set a trap like that and then go to bed?"

"You didn't go to bed. Instead, you put on the raccoon coat, built yourself a fire in the woods to keep from freezing, and stayed there until it was safe to go back. That's when the bottom of your coat got wet and it was still damp in the afternoon. You went back to the house just before you expected your caller. Yes, you knew somebody would be there at nine. All you had to do was pretend to be unconscious when you were discovered.

"But your caller spent extra time going to get me, and you were on the verge of pneumonia from exposure—you actually did become unconscious. It was quite a chance you took but you very nearly got away with it. You tumbled into bed never knowing Sherry was out, too."

"And why did I do this?"

"Behind Joe's back you played the market and lost. That morning's meeting was with an accountant—the man who had the appointment—and his disclosure would have told Joe everything. That plus your deep animosity to the family."

Matt's eyes dimmed; he sat unmoving a long time, and finally he said, "I didn't have any animosity to Sherry. I really loved that woman but after she married Joe she wouldn't have anything to do with me. It got to where if I couldn't have her I didn't want anybody else to."

The forest is the same again. A few families have looked at the Blake cabin, but when they hear about the tragedy they decide to go elsewhere. It is Manitou Land again.

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DEPARTMENT OF SECOND STORIES

Ellen Arthur's first story, "Cal Always Said," appeared in the November 1971 issue of EQMM. Her second story, "The Scene of the Crime," reminds us of what we wrote about Lika Van Ness's second story, "Something Like Growing Pains," in our November 1972 issue: it "shows a considerable advance, both in technique and telling; but even more important is the deeper substance of what the author has to say." Yes, our new writers advance impressively—they are the lifeblood of our field for the future . . .

THE SCENE OF THE CRIME

by ELLEN ARTHUR

"Could you let me have Number Twelve if it isn't occupied?" I knew it wasn't—I wouldn't have been standing there asking for it if it was. I told him that twelve was my lucky number, that I had a sale to close in the morning, and the motel clerk looked up, a decency he'd neglected till then. He was a little man with fuzz on his ears and glasses that bit into a sharp nose, a nose that appeared locked in mid-sniff.

I could see that he didn't care for me, as some short men do not care for tall men, and I could also see that he was wondering if I knew about Number 12. But he gave me the key, and I was able to turn my back and drop the visiting-fireman act.

I took the Volkswagen around, parked it in front of the cluster marked *Rooms 10—20*, and carried my suitcase down the covered cement walk. I paused to look down a tunnel-like opening between Room 15 and Room 16; there was a door with a bug light above it and a sign under the light: *LAUNDRY*, and beneath that, *ICE*. As I passed windows, some lighted, others dark, all with drawn curtains, I thought of my sister, Cara, taking this walk two weeks earlier, walking with a young sailor beside her. What

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on earth had gone wrong? How had she angered him? What could she have refused that young man—Cara, who never refused anyone anything?

The Lord knows I had tried to find out, tried my best to see the sailor, but his lawyer was inflexible. A man with no handles. Just a few hours ago he'd thrown me out of his office again, actually threatening me with a Peace Bond.

I unlocked the door of Number 12 and thought how much of a child Cara had been. Even at 34 she had been a child. She'd gone into this room like a little girl crawling into an abandoned refrigerator, full of anticipation, thinking of spooky secret fun, and finding death instead. She must have been terrified. Peering into the dark room I was suddenly ashamed. I called myself a voyeur, a morbid and foolish man. There was nothing rational in my coming here, and I like to think I'm rational.

Yet I reached inside for the light switch and entered the room—because Cara's death had unsettled me so, and because I couldn't shake the notion that here, alone in the place where she had died, away from family and friends, I might be able to understand what had happened.

I closed the door and looked around at once for the ice bucket, deliberately putting off a study of the room until I could make a drink. A few minutes later, filling the bucket, standing in the gloomy light that haloed the ice machine, I felt like the murderer himself. He had been here and had bought a soft drink from that humming machine over in the corner—he had admitted that much.

There was some validity in identifying with him. I *was*, in one sense, Cara's killer. Because I loved her best. If anyone could have deflected Cara, I was the one. I loved her best. It was wrong of me to care for her more than my good sister Rachel, more than my decent parents; but it had always been so. Perhaps if I'd tried harder . . .

Sometimes I could reach her. I had stopped her drinking. That was years ago, and not until after she'd wrecked her car and put our father in the hospital, but I did it. I stayed with her day and night. By the time she came to trial, Cara was finished with drinking for good—though the Lord knows she must have needed it now and then.

I went back to Room 12, fixed my drink, and examined the room. I tried hard to see something meaningful, but of course I couldn't. What an idiot

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I was! The room was like every other motel room—reproduced by cloning, marching to infinity, living up to the promise of all its twins: it would tell nothing, not a whisper.

Everything in the room confirmed it: soap in a sealed wrapper, glass in a transparent paper bag, writing paper in an envelope in the center drawer. Who has been on the road in America and could not find his way stone-blind around such a room? What had I hoped to learn?

I sat with my Scotch, going slow because I knew I would make another as soon as the glass was empty. How else could I sit where the murderer must have sat before he put his hands around my sister's throat? Why had he done it? My one brief look at him had left me baffled. He seemed incredibly young, didn't look strong enough or cruel enough. But he'd done it, and then, stricken by what he'd done, had fled barefoot in the night, leaving Cara for the maid to find.

He had, of course, denied it when they caught him. He claimed to have gone out for a soft drink and returned to hear voices in the room: "What's the matter with you? This is me, Carolyn!" And an angry male voice: "I know who you are." The young sailor said he ran, assuming that Cara had a husband who had tracked them to the motel. He had not known she was dead, he said, until they arrested him two days later.

A single word in his story, the name Carolyn, caused me to doubt his guilt momentarily. I thought George Kiley might have killed her—Cara had been married to him, and I must admit she gave him reasons to murder her. But that was a long time ago, and I realized at once that George wouldn't have bothered with Cara; he would never have slipped so clumsily between the rungs of the ladder he was climbing. George was a big man now, and he meant to be bigger.

No, the sailor did it. Cara must have mentioned her given name in some context or other, and he cleverly decided it would give his story the sound of truth. Well, he would pay now for whatever joy Cara might have brought him. People always did.

I sat listening to the anonymous sounds: traffic on the highway, crickets, a television playing, indistinct voices in the room next door, an occasional thud. Cara had died among such sounds.

I had seen her two nights before her death. She was appearing at the Court Lounge, and I went to see her. No one

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else in the family kept any contact with her, but occasionally I drove reasonable distances to hear her sing, to sit and talk with her. She had a moderately good voice and a strikingly intimate way of using it—a sort of piano-lounge voice. I enjoyed it. No—more than that—I was grateful for it, because, to be truthful, all of us, even I, had been relieved when Cara found this way to make a living. It kept her out of New England a good part of the time, and we'd been wondering how to do that. She became Cara, billing herself by the one name, and troubling our lives less than we'd ever dared hope.

I remember that she sang well that last time I saw her, seemed more beautiful than ever, and I was proud of her. Her soft smoky songs suited her; they were all of a piece with her tilted eyes and her full unsubtle mouth. She did surprise me with her final number, *Those Were the Days.* It wasn't a tempo she would ordinarily choose, but she handled it well, and I think of it now particularly because it was the last enjoyable part of that evening.

We had coffee together after closing, and I bullied her. I was angry that she hadn't told me she was coming to the Court, that I'd picked up the information by hearing her voice on a local radio talk show—a promotion for her current appearance. I was also more than a little annoyed at the things she'd told the talkmaster. They were views I knew she held, but I never expected to hear her speak of them on the radio. "Suppose Mother had heard you?" I asked. "Or Rachel?"

She looked at me strangely, as if trying to place these people I'd mentioned. "Did they?"

"I don't know. I don't think so."

She shrugged. "Well then? Anyway, the man wanted a good interview—I couldn't let him down. But I'm sorry you heard it," she said, and I knew she meant it.

I argued and made her sad. I accused her—a stab I knew was false—of aping the new generation. I tried to make her consider the family. I spoiled that meeting, and even though I didn't know it was our last, I went away angry with myself as well as Cara . . .

Taking these thoughts with me to the window of the motel room, I parted the curtains and stared out at the highway, at the occasional car moving in the night like someone breathing in and out. I told myself that I couldn't have changed her, that she was never very different, not even when she was small and we had called her Carolyn.

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Hadn't she always given what was asked—anything—toys, candy, clothes, her company, her complicity? Once she pulled a fire alarm and would only say that she was asked to do it. Lord, how she tormented our parents, such dutiful people, so religious . . .

I closed the curtains abruptly. The thought of my parents, the image of my mother at Cara's graveside—Rachel, too—their patient animal eyes . . . It was impossible to stand quietly, so I prowled the motel room, opening drawers, slamming them shut. I saw the extra blankets in the deep drawer, thick maroon blankets, probably never unfolded. Who needed them in a motel room? Such a warm place, full of the warmth of flesh. And, ah, yes, there was the writing paper—even more useless. People found other things to do, and the paper stayed pure in its pure packet.

I decided to tear it up, make a change, dent the complacency of the room. The maid would be astonished at having to replenish the silly envelope. I was standing with the paper in my hand, ready to rip, when I noticed something on the back of the envelope that I'd tossed onto the dresser. I can remember seeing myself in the mirror, I remember my astounded face looking back at me.

It was a foolish thing that I saw marked on the envelope—or would have been if I hadn't known what it was. A scribble. Two small crosses inked thoughtlessly there; each with three tiny circles, two in the upper angles of the crossbeam, and the third enclosing the intersection of the cross. The doodle had religious significance, the three circles representing the members of the Holy Family. I knew because I had often drawn it myself—in imitation of my father. He had learned it sometime in childhood, perhaps putting it at the top of his papers in parochial school. My father. An usher in church, taking time between his duties to kneel in a rear pew, praying for Cara, praying with suffocating monotony.

I didn't have to ask myself why my father had done it; only why *now*, when Cara's life touched his so seldom? There had been times when I wouldn't have blamed him, times when Cara must have ground his soul too fine. Why, for example, hadn't he killed her that dawn when he found her, after a long night of searching, asleep on a littered beach, curled up on the sand, some man's shirt clutched in her upflung fist, and a smile on her still face? That was a time for murder.

Shortly before Cara died, I

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was reminded of that awful scene. I was walking along a pond beach, feeling disturbed by the carelessness of people—the discarded cans, the empty cigarette packs, the profusion of flip-top tabs, looking like female symbols, cheap aluminum statements of sin. Suddenly I was seized with the fear that if I kept walking I would see Cara stretched out amid the trash, perhaps just beyond the next bend . . . Three days later she was dead. Perhaps it was a premonition meant to prepare me for her death. But nothing, nothing could have prepared me for that motel room or lessened the impact of that damning scribble I held in my hand.

The envelope with the scribble had to be burned. With shaking fingers I began to tear it and stack it in the little ashtray. I struck a match and watched the flame catch up the crosses, curling and twisting them. Tiny stickmen dancing in fire. How had my father come to make them, I wondered. Had he stayed in the room with Cara's body? I couldn't imagine it.

Then I thought of the young sailor. My father had, appallingly, been waiting for him to return! Good God! The sailor had done right to flee—"*Let him who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak.*" He had certainly saved himself.

But *had* he? I understood then for the first time the difficulty facing me, and I wished to God I had never come to this room. I did not want to know that the sailor was innocent and that he was not at all safe. He and my father could not both be safe. It lay before me like a physical law: two bodies cannot occupy the same safety at the same time.

I lifted the telephone, replaced it, and drank. Then I lifted it again, replaced it, and drank again. Cara, I thought bitterly, would have no problem about this. She would save the sailor because he was the immediate one; later she would give all her comfort to our father. But I was not Cara. And my father was very beloved to me.

I was still struggling with this enormity when I heard footsteps coming along the walk. They stopped at my door, and someone knocked sharply. Who? No one knew where I was. No one. Puzzled, I opened the door and saw two men. One was a detective—I knew him, Sergeant Mooney; the other one I'd never seen. Mooney spoke. "Hello, Mr. Kane. This is Detective Pierce. Can we talk for a few minutes?"

I nodded dumbly. They had discovered something. Why else would they come? Oh, my poor

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father. "Of course, Sergeant. Come in. How did you know I was here?"

Mooney and I took the chairs and Pierce sat on the bed. I offered them a drink and they turned it down. Mooney's serious face made me increasingly certain that they knew about my father's guilt. At least I hadn't been the one to tell them.

"How did you know where to find me?" I asked.

"The clerk," Mooney said. "He remembered seeing you at the inquest and he thought it was strange—you coming here and asking for this room."

"Of course," I said. "I should have realized. But then I was so upset that day. I suppose he would have been there, wouldn't he?" I tried to speak calmly, aware now that they *didn't* know about my father. They had come simply because the nosey little man at the desk had called them.

"Why *are* you here?" Mooney asked. He was a big man, ponderous, kind. I'd known him for years. We met at Cara's trial. After the car crash. He was with the Accident Investigation Unit then. He tented his fingers now and peered at me through the aperture. It was a gesture I'd seen him make before. Pierce sat silent on the bed.

"I thought I could understand something about Cara's death if I came here alone." It sounded lame now, even to me. Policemen are very realistic. It's difficult to speak to them about feelings and fancies.

"You know, Mr. Kane," Sergeant Mooney said, "when we got this call I kind of thought it might be you. The clerk didn't remember who you were—just that he'd seen you in court. It was the second call I got about you. The other one was from the sailor's lawyer. You were there again."

The other detective got up suddenly and moved toward the dresser. He motioned to Mooney and we all stared at the ashtray. "Were you burning something, Mr. Kane?"

I tried to distract them by speaking of my need to see the sailor, to question him. But it was useless. The one called Pierce put the charred curls into a small plastic bag, and Mooney turned to me. "We have several unidentified prints from this room," he told me, "prints that don't belong to your sister or the sailor or the help. We assumed that previous occupants had left them. Do you think some of them are going to turn out to be yours, Mr. Kane?"

I sat down and covered my face. I could see where my

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bungling was leading. "No, Sergeant, they won't be mine. I may as well tell you. I can see you're going to find out. It was my father. He needs help." I told him the story then, hating myself for telling it. I finished by asking him if the burned envelope could be reconstructed.

Mooney didn't answer. His eyes were curiously opaque; there was something in them I couldn't read. "Are you feeling okay?" he asked. "Who's your family doctor, Mr. Kane? And your lawyer?" Then he launched into a torrent of words, and I knew, incredibly, that he was reading me my rights. It made me wild.

"What's wrong with you? Haven't you been listening? My father killed her—he needs help!"

Sergeant Mooney took me by the arm, gently. "Do you remember when we first met?" he asked. It seemed an odd question under the circumstances. "Do you remember that your sister went to prison for manslaughter? In connection with the death of your father?"

My head began to pain as I tried to figure out what he was up to. Was this lie supposed to shock some additional information out of me? Did he think I was holding back? We went outside, the three of us, and I saw the little man, the clerk standing on the walk. What on earth could be happening? I decided to ask him.

"Pardon me, sir. I wonder if you know anything about the laws of this state concerning vehicular homicide?" My question appeared to unnerve him. His eyes loomed large behind his glasses, his face paled. I shall never forget how he looked standing there as we drove away, hopping, agitated, just like a disabled bird.

I think of him now as I stare sourly at the doctors. I am so ghastly weary of doctors. That little man is the one who needs a doctor. These doctors need doctors. They crouch around me like crocodiles, their mouths yawning, their mouths full of insinuations and lying questions. This is the most godawful place I've ever stayed in—worse than a motel.

These people are inordinately interested in personal matters. They would give anything to know, for instance, why I've never married. A gross invasion of my privacy. They also question me closely about the crosses and circles that I pen idly while they talk. They suspect some deep inner meaning—no matter that I tell them it's a common doodle, that my father frequently scribbles it

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quite unconsciously. One of them tried to tell me that my father never recovered from the accident, that he died years ago. He's in collusion with Sergeant Mooney, I see that now—I see it clearly.

But they are all liars in one way or another. Their mouths are filled with soft cottony lies. I watch the wisps move gently at the back of their throats as they breathe in and out. I'd like to put out my hands and stop them, squeeze off the air. They won't leave me alone, and I need time to sort out my sister's death.

I will never rest until I discover why that sailor killed Cara. She wouldn't have refused him anything. I know that. I'm certain that if I could get out of here, if I could go to the place where she died, sit in that motel room, that I could puzzle it out, that I could find the answer.

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a *NEW* crime story by

DOLORES HITCHENS

Dolores Hitchens' newest short story is about "a villain without a flaw," and the "way to kill an old person"... a wry dry tale that will persist in your memory...

BLUEPRINT FOR MURDER

by DOLORES HITCHENS

"The way to kill an old person," said Mr. Harvod, "is just to let them die." He had the wineglass poised at his lips; behind it he grinned archly.

Young Tenny grinned back across the expanse of white linen and slender tapers of crystal and silver. "But suppose the old person decides not to oblige, like. Suppose he or she doesn't turn up toes just because you wish it? So then what?"

His uncle set down the wineglass. The wine shone like a jewel, full of shimmering reflections. "There's more to it than that, of course. But old age *is* fragile."

As if to add emphasis to this point, his uncle's voice hoarsened and trembled. And the hand at the base of the wineglass quivered as it withdrew.

"When you take away all reason for wanting to live," Mr. Harvod continued, "an old person is inclined to fade. Just to fade away. I observed this among my relatives at a fairly early age."

Again he smiled at Tenny, and offered the wine bottle, at which Tenny shook his head and murmured, "Thank you."

"I killed my Aunt Susan that way," his uncle said almost casually. "Just deprived her Got the right kind of nurse to neglect her. Her bed always smelly and disordered, her hair matted and nails left untrimmed. No shoes if she should happen to want to get out of bed. No robe, either."

Tenny shook his head, but whether in dismay or in

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admiration it would have been hard for anyone to tell.

Mr. Harvod sat up straighter in the wheel chair and his face took on the expression of a memory well savored. "She had a little dog she was fond of. It disappeared. And her pet bird died. It lay in its cage for several days before anyone got round to taking it away. The rosebush outside her window, a climber full of yellow blooms, got broken somehow."

Tenny seemed suddenly subdued. He drank half of his wine and took several bites off his plate. "You felt good about all this?"

Mr. Harvod shrugged inside the satin robe with its splendid lapels. The two men were high above the city and the last of the daylight was dying beyond the silk-shrouded windows. The apartment seemed suddenly stilled, expectant, as if waiting to know how the old man had felt about committing murder.

"I was doing her a favor," Mr. Harvod said. "She was old and incurably sick and part of the sickness was this fierce desire to cling to life, to think of life as worth possessing. I simply arranged things so that living didn't look that rosy, and soon she became willing to let go."

"How did she do that?"

"Turned her face to the wall one day. Three days later she was gone. We cleaned up before we called the doctor and the undertaker. The nurse and I."

"The nurse was in on it?" Tenny was now making hefty inroads on the lobster.

"Not really, if you understand. She was just a slovenly woman doing what came naturally. I paid her a small bonus and it surprised her very much. She knew what she was. She didn't comprehend what I was."

"A villain without a flaw," Tenny responded admiringly, and his uncle giggled. "You never felt a moment's remorse or softening?"

His uncle's face sobered as if Tenny had said something unpardonable, but he replied at once. "Well, of course, Tenny, I had wee moments of weakness. Wouldn't anyone? The worst one, I'll admit, was when I took the dead bird away, and then for an instant my eyes met those of my aunt, with her lying there on those rumpled and stained pillows and me in my new clothes. I was already spending the money, you see. In that little time that we looked at each other, *directly* at each other, I could see this—well, this beseeching kind of thing. In her eyes."

The old man made an impatient, dismissing gesture

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with the hand holding the fork and narrowly missed overturning his wineglass.

Marshall the manservant stuck his white-haired head in from the kitchen to see how they were doing, and discreetly withdrew. Tenny noted the brief intrusion. Marshall, he thought—yes, Marshall would have to go. Retired, replaced by someone more suitable. There would be a third one, he decided. Marshall's replacement wouldn't prove out and then there would be another, the final choice. The nonpareil. He grinned crookedly to himself. "You got over those moments of weakness?"

"Oh, yes. They were only passing moments. I had the main thing in mind all the time. I never looked directly at Aunt Susan again."

Tenny picked up his glass. "I do love this wine. May I have another bottle or two? After all, it was you who spoiled me."

"Well, certainly. What I have is yours, Tenny."

So true. But in the back of Tenny's mind was a worry. How many times had his uncle told that story of Aunt Susan and how many people might have heard him? There was no statute of limitations on murder, and might be none on inheritances gained thereby. He really had to be shut up.

When dinner was over, Tenny strolled the length of the room and gazed down through a window at the darkness of Central Park below, and at the banks of lights beyond. No hum of traffic, no sound of horn or siren penetrated to this anachronism of an apartment high in its niche. It was old and well built.

While he was near the window Tenny brushed the potted plants in their rack and thrust a nail through the main stem of that new plant his uncle had been puttering over when Tenny had arrived. Tenny's fingers skillfully drew up the potting mix to cover the wound before he moved on.

When at last he said goodbye and had let Marshall help him into his coat, he went down in the elevator and wasted no time going to the desk to speak to the lobbyman. "My uncle wants me to take some more of his wine. I left a bag here when I came in."

The lobbyman was nearsighted and somewhat deaf; it took a little time to straighten him out and retrieve the outsized shopping bag. In the cellar he chose half a dozen choice bottles. He had an excellent market for them.

Remembering his uncle's words, he smiled dryly: he was already spending the money.

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Nice to have a blueprint, he added, his smile brightening—a blueprint supplied by the victim, no less. Nice, really nice.

As Tenny stood at the curb, the bag of wine at his feet, waiting for a cab, he had an instant's temptation to turn and look up. To search for the wispy face which would be peering down at him from that high window. His shoulders tensed to lift his head backward, but then he put the idea firmly behind him. He might, staring up in the near-dark, imagine a touch of—what was the word his uncle had used? Beseeching. That was it. He might imagine a touch of that and it was best not to have it to remember later.

In the cab he set the bag of wine carefully beside him. If his uncle had seen it and later commented on its size, he could say he'd left a bundle with the lobbyman—things he'd shopped for earlier. Not that his uncle would remember to say anything. Most of the time now the old man's mind seemed quite confused. Only on the subject of Aunt Susan was he completely clear.

Tenny let his thoughts fly ahead to his own apartment, small but snug, full of his own choices in music and books and prints, and where Inez might be waiting for him.

One thing to keep in mind, he recalled.

I will never, he told himself, look the old man directly in the eyes again. This decision made, Tenny relaxed against the cushion of the cab seat.

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A new story that reads like American folklore . . .

THE SHOOTING OF CURLY DAN; or, The Gandy Dancers' Lament

by JOHN LUTZ

Ollie Robinson was my great-great-grandfather, and he didn't know himself how old he was or where he was born. He was a smart man, but he didn't have much education, and he kept to himself most of the time because of how the other kids would make fun of him. When I was younger I used to laugh at him myself, then all of a sudden one day I got to thinking, I was 13, and he was—what? 113? But I had found out that when he told a story, it was worth listening to, because he was a man who'd done things and been places and met people.

One night when Mom and Dad weren't home he told me the story of Curly Dan's murder that happened when Grandpa Ollie—that's what I called him—was a gandy dancer for the Alton and Southern Railroad. That railroad is gone now, and so are gandy dancers, I expect. Grandpa Ollie didn't tell me how long ago it happened, but it had to be a long, long time. It didn't matter to him, though, because for Grandpa Ollie, sitting there half crippled in his cane chair, chin stuck out and skin loose and wrinkled like an old dollar bill, the past was sometimes right there all around him.

I was sitting near his chair, listening to the even in-and-out rhythm of his breathing and thinking he was asleep. Way off somebody was beating on something metal with a hammer, and maybe that's what kept him from dozing off like he usually did. But he wasn't asleep, and he began talking to me in a voice clearer than his usual voice—younger-sounding, like he was really back there living what he was telling me, living it all over again . . .

All the railroads had crews of gandy dancers in them days (Grandpa Ollie began), eight or ten strong men to a crew and a caller. I was a gandy dancer for three years with the A & S, but I guess you don't know what a gandy dancer be. When trains go

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over and over a set of rails, them rails gets crooked and outa line with each other, and somebody's got to set 'em straight again. They got a machine does it now, but then it was done like most things, with sweat and muscle.

There was nine men on each Alton and Southern line crew, 'long with a line chief usually. The company engine would drop us off way out where the rails didn't have no care for a long time and we'd walk along carryin' our pry bars while the line chief kept his eye on the rails that needed work done on 'em. There was a flat cart with water and tools that we pushed along with us, 'cause we done other work besides just truin' the rails. Sometimes we'd have to take a hammer and drive loose spikes, or shovel earth under a section of roadbedding that had give way.

The day Curly Dan was killed we didn't have a line boss, like we didn't sometimes the day before payday, 'cause the foreman, he be workin' on the payroll and paperwork, and he figured ol' Ivy Joe was good enough to be caller and boss both. The line boss and his crew was over on a section of track the other side of a rise, close enough so we could hear the ringin' of their steel and sometimes their voices.

Ivy Joe, that wasn't his true name, but his initials was I. V., so that's what we called him. Now we'd walk along the track, carryin' our pry bars, till Joe spotted a place needed work. Our pry bars was about five feet long and tempered steel, kinda curved and flattened on one end. When we wanted to line track we'd stand in a row 'longside it and put the flattened ends of the bars under the rail. Then, like the big boss always told us, everything depended on rhythm. Nine men had to move like one. That's where Ivy Joe's callin' came in, and he was the best caller the A & S ever had.

When we all had our pry bars 'neath the rail, ready to use 'em like long levers, that's when Ivy Joe started callin' and we'd all tap the rail in rhythm. Then at the last of his chant he'd raise his voice sudden and we'd all put our backs in it together and there'd be a loud ring of steel and we'd move that rail. Over and over we'd do it till the rails was true, then we'd walk on downtrack to the next bad spot.

It were a hot day when the murder happened, and we hadn't had a water break since middle mornin' and the sun was near high. Steel was ringin' and Ivy Joe was callin' the rhythm:

Tell me line boss eyes be blind
How he gonna tell if the rails in line?

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And we'd all pull back together and strike steel in rhythm to inch the rail over. We stopped for a water break after that bad section were trued and I can tell you ain't none of us didn't need it.

Then we worked on ahead, leavin' the water and tool cart sittin' behind as usual till we found another bad place. We was workin' hard on a bend in the rails for some time 'fore Ivy Joe noticed Curly Dan wasn't with us.

"Where that Curly Dan?" he says, standin' with his big fists on his hips. "You know, Slim?"

Slim Deacon was the one helped Curly Dan read letters from Albany. His lean body kinda bent and he shook his head.

"Chaney?"

Chaney were a big man, always grinnin', and he grinned wider and shrugged his heavy shoulders.

"Ollie," Ivy Joe says to me, "you run on back to the tool cart an' see if that lazy Curly Dan be layin' out on us."

I took out runnin', listenin' to the ringin' rhythm of the line crew across the rise while my feet hit the ties.

When I rounded the bend and ran a ways, there be Curly Dan, layin' on his side, kinda curled up around the water jug that was still sittin' on the ground. His blue shirt back were covered with blood where he'd been shot, the bullet goin' clear through, and when I got closer I could see he'd been shot in the back of the head, too, like someone wanted to make sure he be dead.

Everything seemed unnatural quiet and still there. Even the water just below the top of the jug were as calm and still as Curly Dan hisself.

I run back halfway round the bend, yellin' and wavin', and the rest of the crew followed me back to Curly Dan's body. For a while we all stood and stared, lookin' from one to the other.

"How come we didn't hear no shot?" Arky said. He was a short wide man from Arkansas that always had a blade of grass in his teeth.

Ivy Joe looked round him towards the rise and a grove of trees. " 'Cause the killer timed his shot with the rhythm," he says. "Brogan's crew be workin' over the rise when we was here, and when they hit steel hard is when the killer pulled the trigger from the trees over there."

Then Ivy Joe walks over to the grove of trees and a while later comes back holdin' a pistol. "It be a small gun," he said, "and I

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found where the brush was flattened down where the killer was hidin'." Then he looked real close at the body, standin' there holdin' the pistol and thinkin'. "Load Curly Dan onto the tool cart," he said, and we did that and put up the tools and water jug that was still layin' there from our last work break. Kelly, a bowlegged man with a big mustache, and a man name of Tall Al slid Curly Dan well to the back so's he wouldn't get blood on any of the tools.

"What we gonna do now?" Chaney asked, standin' with his arms crossed.

"We gonna work," Ivy Joe told him. "We gonna work on." And we went on down the tracks.

"Who'd have any reason to shoot Curly Dan?" Ben Zebo said while we was walkin' back to where we'd left off workin'.

Nobody answered 'cause everybody know'd who. There was three men on the crew coulda done it for reason. Chaney was sweet on Curly's little gal, Molly Ann Parker, who'd been all his till Curly Dan took her over. And a man named Handy Billy Grover, he was awful sweet on her too, and he and Curly Dan'd had a fight about her just a few days ago. If any of 'em had any sense they'd just waited, 'cause Molly Ann woulda come round to 'em again. Then there was Arky, who Curly Dan owed fifty dollars to, and who'd been in a argument with him last week over Curly Dan not payin' up.

Ivy Joe know'd all these things, but he didn't say any of 'em as we kept on walkin' 'long the tracks, listenin' to Brogan's crew ringin' steel on the return line over the rise. Kelly with the big mustache was laggin' behind us, pushin' the cart along the tracks real slow and keepin' his distance from Curly Dan.

We got to where we was linin' track, took our places again along the outside rail, and slid our pry bars under the steel. Ivy Joe started to clink his bar in rhythm and sing like always.

Work be hard but I ain' gonna moan
Work my han's 'til I see de bone!

Steel rung and we moved that rail 'bout an inch. It were a song Ivy Joe'd sung lots before and we was all in rhythm, pullin' hard and together.

'Long the bend we was workin' was the worst section of track on the Alton and Southern but for the Gibsey Hill, and we could look ahead in the sun and see rail shimmerin' outa line for a long ways. We worked on and sweat was runnin' down us all.

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Somebody hide an' shoot Curly Dan
Shame to kill dat young good man!

All the while Ivy Joe sang we was tappin' rhythm on the steel, all together and bendin' our backs to it at the last when he'd raise his fine voice. Movin' rail, we was, and then walkin' on to more rail. The sun be high and hot as I ever felt it, and we was all walkin'-weary soon, throats dry and eyes burnin' with sweat. I seen Arky in front of me, staggerin' some as we walk on down the line.

"When we gonna stop for water?" Chaney yelled, but Ivy Joe, he didn't hear and kept right on workin'.

Somebody on de railroad crew
Know how to shoot when the rhythm do!

And the steel clang together like one clang, all through the song, then loud like to make your head hurt.

We work on for must've been hours like that, in kind of a daze like you'd get when Ivy Joe was callin' rhythm. We was all tired and achin', and I remember how my back felt like it was blazin' and it pained me to lean. Still we kept the rhythm, 'cause the job, it be all rhythm.

There be sorrow for Molly Ann
Somebody done gone an' shoot her man!

I pulled up and back on my pry bar, feelin' a pain down my stomach, and the rail hardly move and I heard a little clink just a eyewink after the other men had pulled hard together.

"Water," Handy Billy called out, and we all called out for water. Billy's clothes was stickin' to him and his face be all swollen where he kept wipin' his sleeve to keep the sweat outa his eyes.

Someone here he done hang back
Kill Curly Dan when we move downtrack!

Much pain as there be, we still tried to keep up the rhythm. My mouth was dry as sand and the pain almost kept me from straightenin' as the steel rang, and again I heard that clang of a pry bar outta time.

One man kill fo' a woman's all
Now a rope gonna stop his fall!

"I got to have water!" Handy Billy yelled again with his voice all cracked when the steel ring, and I could hardly hear if there was a late ring that time.

The heat be risin' from the ground, and I know'd any time I was gonna fall flat on my face, but we worked on, gaspin' for

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breath and tryin' to ignore the achin'. Then again there was a late ring of steel, this time later than before, and there was a thuddin' sound too, and we turned and seen the last man in the crew layin' out on the ties with his chest heavin'.

Ivy Joe walked on back and looked down at him. "You the one killed Curly Dan, Chaney," he said like he know'd for sure.

Chaney just looked up at him and kinda croaked.

Then Ivy Joe let us all have water, but not Chaney. Ivy Joe standed over him with the ladle full after everybody else drunk. He let a few drops fall down on Chaney's forehead.

"You killed him," Ivy Joe said again.

"I done it," Chaney said in a raw voice. "I done it to get Molly Ann, an' I used her gun. Danny, he had it comin' to him!" He raised up a hand what was all bloody and blistered like everybody else. "Now gimme some water!"

Ivy Joe let him drink then, and I didn't think Chaney was ever gonna stop drinkin'.

"How'd you know it were him?" Handy Billy asked, wonderin' on his luck at bein' Molly Ann's one and only again. "It didn't have to be a railroad man to time his shot with the rhythm."

"It be a railroad man," Ivy Joe said. "That's why he left the gun, so's we wouldn't find it on him. I know'd it was prob'ly one of three men at first: Arky, Chaney, or you, Handy Billy. I figured it wasn't Arky that shot a man who owed him money, 'cause it's day before payday. Least he'd do is wait a day or two."

Ivy Joe looked back towards where we come from. "Instead of linin' up for water, the killer hid in them trees during water break, seein' Curly Dan was last in line for a drink, then picked him off when the rest of us was walkin' away uptrack. Then he caught up with us 'fore we missed him and was there to help us move track."

"But it coulda been somebody else," Billy said. "It coulda been somebody from the crew over the rise."

"I know'd it were someone from our crew," Ivy Joe said, " 'cause of the way Curly Dan was layin' curled round the water jug where he'd been drinkin'. He musta been shot first in the back, then fell, 'cause the bullet come out the front and there were no hole in the jug, or the jug wouldn't be full like we found it.

"Now from that distance a shot in the head is a funny way to make sure you done finished a man off, but that's where Curly Dan was shot again while he were layin' there on the ground. Why in the head? Like I said, so's not to break the water jug and lose

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our water. So then I know'd the killer was on our crew and was the only one hadn't had a water break since early mornin'. In this heat, first man to drop from thirst would likely be Curly Dan's killer. And when it were Chaney that dropped first I *know'd.*"

Ivy Joe sent a man on ahead, and we stayed where we was till a whistle blowed and smoke raised up and the big company engine come on down those straight true rails to take Chaney back to the company yards. To take him back where by and by the hangman be waitin' for him.

Then we started workin' again.

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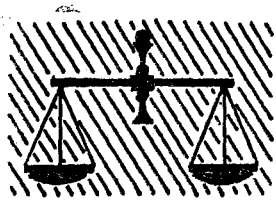

THE JURY BOX

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

Once more, although the month has provided some very poor books, a particular disappointment from usually reliable authors, it has also provided some very good ones. Nor will any critic complain that his grab-bag lacks variety when he can cite one detective novel both amusing and exciting, one cops-and-robbers caper in a stately cathedral city, one hell-roaring mystery-adventure, and one volume of short stories from the Victorian master of sensationalism a century ago. Any disappointing items may be left in limbo, according to custom. This department, a kind of criminous sundial, marks only the bright hours.

At an astronomical observatory in Rome, background of Dorothy Dunnett's *Murder in Focus* (Houghton Mifflin, $5.95), the high jinks of Ruth Russell, attractive astronomer-photographer—with her two colleagues and her boy friend, Charles Digham—suddenly go all awry with meaningless persecution-cum-murder.

That curious character with the toy balloon, who has stolen Charles's camera, gets his head blown off in the men's room at the zoo. Thus begins a chase in which our friends sometimes seem to be pursued by floating toy balloons which may or may not contain high explosive. As in other novels by Mrs. Dunnett, scenes of uproarious comedy precede scenes of genuine thrill, including the corpse in the deep-freeze at the observatory. Johnson Johnson, both eminent painter and Secret Service agent, is again on hand to unsnarl the tangle as pursuit ranges from Rome to Naples, then along the Mediterranean and back to Rome for a sensational finale whose villain may escape your notice. Mark it A-plus.

In *The Theft of Magna Carta*, by John Creasey (Scribners, $5.95), two suave international art thieves—American Neil Stephenson and British Frank Caldicott, assisted by the beautiful Sarah—plan their most spectacular coup. The Sarum Great Charter, best-preserved copy of that treasured document wrung from King John in 1215 and now guarded by elaborate measures at Salisbury Cathedral, will be worth millions on a crooks' market.

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"It can't be stolen," the authorities say. But it can be; it almost is.

Mastermind Stephenson, employing musclemen as ruthless as himself, kidnaps an all-too-human young policewoman for the plotters' blackmail weapon against Detective Chief Superintendent Roger West and all-too-human Sergeant Tom Batten, the policewoman's lover.

It's a near thing, but don't worry. Before they finish, with Salisbury Cathedral all but ripped apart in flames, Superintendent West has met his formidable challenge and John Creasey has written his best story.

As an explosive thriller which gives no respite, Robert Ludlum's *The Matlock Paper* (Dial Press, $7.95) will blow your ears off. The grimy silver-paper message found on a dead man in Turkey has given Washington's Department of Justice their clue to the vast secret criminal organization called Nimrod. Nimrod's center, they have good reason for believing, may be found at sedate Carlyle University in Connecticut. And so maverick-spirited young Dr. James Matlock, Associate Professor of English, is enlisted to learn Nimrod's secrets and destroy it.

No sooner has our young academic been briefed than some unknown hand guns down the Justice Department's agent in a phone booth. Matlock, with a beautiful mistress on campus and no caution to speak of, plunges headlong through a nightmare world with menace round every corner and behind every bush. As a connoisseur of mysteries you will probably spot the principal villain; but, torture or tragedy notwithstanding, you won't stop reading until the end.

Very substantially paperbound, *Tales of Terror and the Supernatural*, by Wilkie Collins, selected and introduced by Herbert van Thal (Dover, $3.00), well illustrates, as though we hadn't known it already, that this Victorian master knew a thing or two about his craft.

These tales, gleaned from *After Dark* (1856) and *The Queen of Hearts* (1859), deal very little with the supernatural; in most cases ghostly tremors are invoked only to be dispelled. Mania or human evil provides the cauld grue, from Latin vengeance in "Blow Up with the Brig!" to the ingenious devilishness of "A Terribly Strange Bed." Take particular note of a fine detective short story, "The Biter Bit," written long before our first fair-play detective novel, *The Moonstone*. Be pleased to try it, good brethren; with Wilkie Collins you can't go wrong.

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A "purely" haunting story . . .

THE HUNTER AND THE HUNTED

by RICHARD A. SELZER

In the past he had always stayed in the island part of the city. It seemed somehow safer, more British, where one might still thread a path of colonial apartness if only in the mind. Kowloon was yellower, deeper in, a pore of Asia. Ambrose could not have explained his decision to stay there this time. It was a caprice that lost amusement even as it was being enacted.

Kowloon was a place full of whispers and soft brushings. Each day a million plots hatched like larvae in its narrow alleys. Everywhere one heard sighing and muttering. Deals were being made, contracts signed, revenge was being sworn. At night there was the angry clacking of mah-jongg tiles from the open windows.

Ambrose felt a vague distress from the instant he got off the Black Star ferry. He had an impulse to get back on and return to Hong Kong, but he fought it down. The harbor steamed in the heat, and the sampans skimmed the oily water like a cloud of brown moths. He would let it go.

To escape from the heat he stepped into the first hotel he saw, a second-rate waterfront place called the Jade Monkey. To his surprise the room to which he was led was cool and light, and faced an inner courtyard full of bamboo trees and camellias. A small open veranda looked down on the garden, and suddenly he was quite glad to be there. There was a rightness about it, that of all the rooms in Kowloon this was the one most suitable. And, after all, he was staying only three days this time. It hardly mattered where he stayed.

When the porter had left, Ambrose removed his jacket and tie, kicked off his shoes and placed them under the bed, then pulled off his socks and lay down. The bed had a clean spicy Chinese smell, of sandalwood and tea.

It was dark when he awoke, and although the heat had retreated from the city he was covered with sweat. Something

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had awakened him. He strained to recall his dream. It came to him that it was not really a dream so much as an overwhelming certainty, as he struggled up out of the depths of his sleep, that someone had turned down the sheet on the bed and crept to his side, lying there silently. He sensed slow quiet breathing and the touch of something exquisitely light and insubstantial.

He swung his feet to the floor only to have them recoil as though he had stepped on a creature of some kind. In fact, what he had felt with his foot was not unlike living flesh. It was warm, soft, and possessed of something like movement or the potential for movement. He reached for the lamp on the nightstand, and in the dim orange glow peered down at what had startled him.

On the floor, neatly side by side, was a pair of slippers. The sight of them shocked him. They were like some indecent intrusion on his privacy. There was something about them that was immediately repellant. Nevertheless he forced himself to pick one up. It was very plain, without ornamentation, of black silk on the outside and with a pink lining that somehow seemed like the inside of the body, membranous, glistening.

For one moment he had the notion that the slipper was indeed living. There was warmth in it, a pulsation, a low throbbing.

He quickly replaced the slipper under the bed and rang for the porter. All at once Ambrose was seized by agitation. He could barely tolerate the confines of the room which he had only hours before seen with such relief and pleasure. At last the man appeared. Ambrose pointed to the slippers.

"These must have been left by the previous occupant. Please take them away."

The porter remained at the doorway, hesitant, his gaze sucked toward that spot under the bed.

"Please hurry. Get them out of here," said Ambrose. His voice disappointed him. It had become thin, had taken on a whiteness that revealed to himself (and to the porter, he feared) the uneasiness that was expanding beneath his ribs. He had to be rid of the slippers instantly. When the porter still failed to comply Ambrose shouted, "Get on with it!"—and was at once ashamed of his manner.

The porter seemed to be undergoing a kind of silent struggle. His body leaned forward above reluctant feet.

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Then abruptly he moved to the bedside in a burst of tiny steps, and, bending, scooped the slippers into his arms as though they were small animals that one had to handle with care for one's own safety and for theirs. When he had withdrawn, Ambrose felt the tension slowly leave him. He lit a cigarette and sat in the dark listening to the sounds of the city.

This was not Ambrose's first trip to the Orient. It was his tenth in as many years as a buyer of *chinoiserie* and Orientalia for the European-American Distributing Company. Ivory gods and little brass pots. It used to amuse him to think of an endless line of potbellied Happy Gods marching all over the world, a kind of Salvation Army, to stand on shelves and in cases next to their little brass pots. He felt like a missionary.

The idea appalled him now and he thrust it from him only to be faced with the even more depressing picture of his life spent so indifferently. He had turned over the events of his life so many times and in so many hotel rooms that the very thoughts were dog-eared with handling.

It was in 1930 that he had been handed his Ph.D. in Chinese history. The depression was in full plummet, and nobody was buying him. For six months he had no job. For three years he was a wheelbarrow man, trundling tar, on a highway pothole crew. Until one day in a bar in Trenton a man said, when Ambrose told him he could speak Chinese, "I can use you." He recalled his almost giddy relief at getting this job. That feeling had been a long time dying—the recollection of poverty had kept it alive. But in the end it had gone, and he was left without enthusiasm or courage. He had done what everyone caught in the depression had done: he had lost his nerve. But that was long ago . . .

The next morning he awoke, unable to remember having returned to his bed. He rose quickly, determined to be about his business, and to keep fully occupied throughout the three days ahead. He donned a dressing gown and left the room for the bathroom at the end of the corridor. After a cool shower and shave he walked briskly back. His watch read six o'clock, too early for most of the guests to be stirring, but he did think that he had heard footsteps on the tiles of the hallway. But he saw no one.

As he opened the door to leave for the day, he turned automatically to survey the room for any forgotten necessity. With a force bordering on

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the painful his heart leaped in his throat. The doorknob rattled in his hand. There, under the bed, neatly arranged side by side, were the slippers. They seemed to glow malevolently in the half gloom of the bed.

After an interminable moment Ambrose thrust himself out of the room, slamming the door shut behind him. He left the hotel without speaking to the desk clerk, determined to return in the evening only long enough to gather his things before finding other quarters in Hong Kong.

All during the day he could not shake off the feeling of uneasiness, the sense of impending doom. From time to time he would, without stopping his gait, glance over his shoulder as though expecting to see something familiar. He hurried from one appointment to another, filling out orders for linen goods and ivory figures. He did not stop for lunch, preferring to work through the day in the hope that activity would leave no room for a return of the previous night's mood.

By the middle of the afternoon he had calmed considerably, helped by the exhilaration of lively business arrangements, a hallmark of Chinese trade.

At four o'clock he stepped into the shade of a teahouse and sat at a table near the sidewalk. He was at once aware that something that had been going on all day had suddenly stopped. He tried to focus his attention on exactly what had so abruptly taken its leave of him, but he was unable to do so. He drank his tea without enjoying the respite, and rose to leave the restaurant. As he did so, in the relative quiet of the indoors, he was again aware that whatever it was, it had resumed, and was continuing in a methodical, rhythmic cadence.

He walked down the street slowly at first, then quickened his step. Whatever it was speeded up to match his acceleration. He stopped and it stopped. Ambrose peered nervously about, searching the faces of passersby, the windows and doorways of the shops. There was no hint. He resumed walking, slowly now like a soldier picking his way through a mine field, every muscle in his body taut.

In a flash of recognition he realized what was accompanying him. It was a sound that had been submerged in the hubbub of the city; but in the past few minutes it had somehow sorted itself out from among the welter of other noises, and had become, by this isolation,

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definite, absolute, identifiable. It was a soft shuffling sound that proceeded at the same rate as his own footsteps, like a smothered echo, a muted reverberation.

Ambrose now knew beyond all doubt that he was being followed.

Panic swarmed over his body, stinging him to wildness. It was an old primitive fright that settled on him, and he needed to respond to it in an equally ancient way—to pick up a rock and then another, and another, and throw them at whatever was hunting him. But there were no rocks, there was no skulker.

The fear swirled aimlessly around, and he was unable to harness it into action. He could call out to it, somewhere into the crowds. "Wait!" he could cry. "There's some mistake. I am not the one you want."

He stopped running, turned around, even cleared his throat to speak, but he could not. The absence of a hearer held him silent. The knowledge that he was helpless came to him then, slowly, insidiously, like the onset of certain diseases that develop for months deep in the tissues before they burst on the consciousness by some encroachment on vitality.

As he returned to the hotel—with the lingering murmur, like the bleating of hundreds of far-off sheep, clinging to him—it came to him for the first time that he might never leave this place, that the hunt was drawing to a close.

Then he was running, hunched, dogged, backtracking, lurching into alleys to await there gasping, trying not to faint, later sidling out into a moving crowd. Always and ceaselessly the indecent swish kept pace like the after-image of his own stride. He felt the strength leaking from his body like blood. Suddenly he was at the dock of the Black Star ferry. Passengers were boarding, and he hurtled past the ticket man to stand moist and heaving on the densely packed deck, as wild and staring as any prey that finds refuge in the tall jungle grass. The chugging of the engines pounded against his feet drowning out all other sounds. He strained to listen, but could hear nothing. It was gone! For Ambrose it was like being struck joyously deaf.

In the corridors of the Jade Monkey the setting sun had reddened the walls. Ambrose's walk was slow, processional, that of a man who has no desire to reach his destination, yet cannot remain away from it. He was as though pulled by unseen wires no less irresistible for being beyond the reaches of

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sight. And that other sound *was* there, the soft brushing of the tiles, blurring the edges of his own steps.

As he had done a hundred times in the past twenty-four hours Ambrose wheeled about in the hope of catching sight of—he knew not what.

He saw nothing behind him, nothing but the slowly turning ceiling fans swiping at the red walls.

Even before he had opened the door, while he was still turning the key in the lock, he knew they were there, squatting pink and sleek under the bed. So that when he opened the door and saw them, like broken-off fragments of the sunset, he was not shocked. Outside, in the hall, he had quite suddenly given up hope, the hope that he would escape them, that they would not be there. All at once a phantom of resignation, exactly his size, clicked into place in his body, seizing and occupying every part of it, displacing the fear that had dwelt there for the past many hours. Coolly, deliberately, he closed the door, listening to the click of the lock and its faint metallic echo.

Ambrose walked to the bed and sat down on it, his feet resting mere inches from the slippers. They seemed larger than he remembered. He had thought of them as Chinese, small, certainly much shorter and narrower than his own. But now, with the two side by side, the slippers looked almost equal to the size of his own foot.

He bent to untie his shoelaces, then pulled the shoes off. Next he removed his socks. There was something vulnerable, strangely pathetic about his naked feet. He stared at the slippers, lost in their redness, their age, although they were in fact unmarked by age, unscuffed. Still, to Ambrose they were ancient, with a grave, antique purpose.

He saw them as shuffling about Kowloon for hundreds of years, indifferent to the centuries. There yesterday, today, tomorrow, the conjuring up of some Chinese magic. Once again the idea of living flesh came to him. That lining—mounding like tissue, moist, glistening.

With a slow deliberate movement he raised both feet from the floor and swung them a few inches so that they hung above the slippers. In a moment his toes had sunk out of sight, then his heels were guided home by an index finger.

The fit was as exact—and as unobtrusive—as his own skin.

He felt an urge to laugh, he knew he was smiling. All at once there was no longer the

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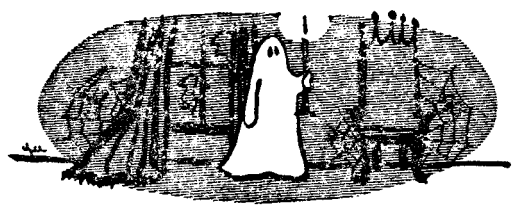
slightest anxiety, but rather a sense of relief. He could scarcely recall his earlier fear or the reason for it.

Ambrose stood and walked about the room, reveling in the feeling of mental and physical comfort. It was as though he had discovered something new and exciting about his body. The inner surface of the door was covered by a floor-length mirror; he stopped in front of it.

What he saw there was a pair of black silk slippers, with pink linings. Nowhere in that mirror did he see his own reflection. Only the slippers on the floor, sleek, empty, satisfied.



NEXT MONTH...

13 NEW stories — including

EDWARD D. HOCH *(about Nick Velvet)*

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ROBERT L. FISH *(about a man with nimble fingers)*

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What bugged little Roger was not so much who, but how . . .

HOW MR. FLYNN DIED

by ELSIN ANN GARDNER

I knew right off when they told me Mr. Flynn had died that something fishy was going on. Well, they didn't exactly *tell* me. Mom and Mrs. Browne were talking about it this morning. I was home from school with a cold and had come downstairs to ask for a glass of soda pop. When I got to the bottom step there was an itch on my foot, so I stood there and scratched it with my other foot. And I heard Mom say, "Dead!"

I never heard Mom sound so surprised. So I sat down on the bottom step, real quiet-like, and listened.

Mrs. Browne, who has this real whiny voice, said, "That's right, Nancy. They found him dead in the bathtub last night. He'd slipped, they figured, and hit his head and drowned."

"The bathroom door was locked?" Mom asked.

"Guess he locked it to keep the kids out. I wonder," she whined, "what those boys will do without their father."

"I know what they'll do," I said to myself. "They'll celebrate."

A picture of Glenn and Harry and Bob dancing around Mr. Flynn's coffin appeared in my head. It sure was a funny sight!

Mr. Flynn was a real rat-fink. He wasn't their *real* father. *He'd* died in the war a couple of years before. Their mother married Mr. Flynn last year. I heard Mom tell Dad that what with three fatherless boys under thirteen, Mrs. Flynn couldn't be too choosy. Boy, she sure wasn't!

Mr. Flynn treated my friends something awful. I'd go over there to play—they're my best friends, you know—and he'd be yelling and screaming at them every minute. And he beat them with a belt. Their real father never did that. He was real nice. I even cried when they learned he'd died.

I wonder if Mrs. Flynn is crying now. I bet she's glad he's dead, too. She'd always get big-eyed and white-faced when he beat her

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sons. Like she wanted to stop him but was afraid to, you know?

Boy, those guys really hated him. We'd be walking home from school and one or the other would say, "Yeah, a bomb!" Right out of the blue he'd say that, but all of us knew what he was talking about. And another would say, "Hold on, you might blow the rest of us up, too. How about some rat poison in his coffee? How about that!"

And they'd argue about that all the way home. That's all they ever talked about, you know?

So I sneaked back upstairs to my room and looked out the window. They live right across the street from us. There wasn't anybody outside their house or anything. I was hoping for a couple of cop cars and maybe some reporters from the paper, but it just looked like it always did.

I crawled back into bed and leaned against the back. The little TV on my bedside table was on, but I turned it off. It was more fun to sit and try to figure out how one of them had killed Mr. Flynn.

What really got to me was, how could one of them have killed him if the bathroom door was locked? That didn't make any sense. But if I could figure out which one had done it, maybe I could then figure out how he did it.

Now, Glenn was the oldest and the bravest. I think he hated his stepfather the most, too. He was a lot braver than his brothers and me. Sometimes I heard him talk back to Mr. Flynn and he got beat plenty hard for that, believe me. But that never stopped Glenn. So bravery should count for something—a whole point, I'd say.

But Bob, who's my age, is the smartest one and could figure out how best to do it. Gee, in class he knows all the answers, and when I have any problem with my homework, which is always, he tells me how to do it. So that's one whole point for Bob.

And Harry, who's between Bob and Glenn, isn't real brave or smart, but he's the one who's crazy about chemistry and all kinds of weird gadgets. His bedroom is filled with wild-looking test tubes and funny scientific things like, you know, in the Mad Scientist's lab in the movies. He's really a nut on it—he mows lawns every summer to get the money to buy the stuff. And any kid who mows lawns all summer has to be a nut, period. Well, anyhow, Harry knows a lot about chemistry. But Mr. Flynn wasn't blown up or poisoned, so Harry doesn't get a whole point.

I tore out a piece of notebook paper and wrote down:

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Glenn — brave 1 point
Bob — smart 1 point
Harry — knows about chemistry and stuff ½ point

Then I thought about the murder itself. Mr. Flynn had slipped in the bathtub, hit his head, and drowned. When he was alone and the door was locked on the inside.

I thought for a second that maybe Mrs. Flynn had done it. She always ran his bath water and when the tub was full she'd lay out his towels and call him. I knew she always did that because once Mom was over there at night and saw it. She told Dad about it, how Mrs. Flynn spoiled him so much, laying out his bath towels and all that. Dad said, that's just the way you treat Roger (that's me) all the time, you spoil him and are turning him into a little sissy. Dad always says I'm turning into a sissy, and I don't think that's funny.

Anyhow, Mrs. Flynn wasn't brave, or she would have stopped her husband when he beat the guys. And she wasn't smart, or she wouldn't have married such an awful creep in the first place.

No, it had to be one of the guys.

But how did he *do* it?

I sat up in bed for a long time thinking about it. I even missed the cartoons that are on at noon. I kept thinking and thinking.

I was still thirsty, so I got out of bed and got a glass of water from the bathroom.

And then it came to me. Boom, just like that!

A month ago Harry sent away for this neat stuff out of a science catalogue. It was supposed to make water wetter so it would flow uphill. He brought a bottle of it over last week after it came in the mail. It was real crazy stuff.

But what I remembered was, after we mixed just a little smidge of it in a glass of water, Bob spilled some on the kitchen floor by accident. And I stepped on it and almost broke my neck. So we emptied the whole glass on the floor and slid around like crazy, until we heard Mom come in the front door. We wiped it up real fast and she never saw it.

I got another piece of notebook paper and wrote:

Harry — had wetter water goo
Bob — came up with the idea of using it
Glenn — put funny wetter water stuff in bathtub

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A car door slammed then and I jumped up and looked out the window. It was the fellows. I opened one window and gave our secret whistle. Glenn looked up and grinned. When I waved to him he ran over and stood under my window.

"Catch this," I said, dropping the piece of paper down to him.

He read it, then tore it up into little pieces and threw the pieces in the air. Then he winked at me and gave me our secret sign.

"Our secret, okay?" he shouted.

"You bet," I yelled back.

Then his mother called him and he went into his house.

When Dad got home from work, Mom told him that Mr. Flynn had died. Dad wasn't even interested. He was mad because she'd let me stay home from school when I didn't even have a fever.

"He *does* have a cold, Jim," Mom said.

"A cold! You coddle him so much he's turning into a little sissy," Dad yelled.

I scrunched up my eyes real tight, but the tears popped out anyways.

Mom said, "Don't keep saying that, Jim! You've hurt him, see?"

But I wasn't really hurt. I was just thinking, why oh why oh why couldn't *I* have a brave older brother and another brother with a chemistry set?

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a *NEW* Appleby story by

MICHAEL INNES

Sir John Appleby was retired, but when an old friend seemed to be in trouble—just what kind of trouble?—Appleby promptly came out of retirement. And it proved to be one of his most unusual and perplexing cases.

Remember what John Donne called "the scandalous disease of headlong dying"? Appleby was reminded of that, and of "certain rather specialized kingdoms of the mind"—and of certain other places like a breast pocket and lungs—places no detective should overlook in certain circumstances . . .

A CASE OF HEADLONG DYING

by MICHAEL INNES

Sir John Appleby had been worried about Charles Vandervell for some time. But this was probably true of a good many of the philosopher's friends. Vandervell's speculations, one friend had wittily remarked, could be conceived as going well or ill according to the sense one was prepared to attribute to "speculations." His last book, titled (mysteriously to the uninstructed) *Social Life As a Sign System*, had been respectfully received by those who went in for that kind of thing; but it was clear that something had gone badly wrong with Vandervell's investments. He was what is called a private scholar, for long unattached to any university or other salary-yielding institution, and had for years lived very comfortably on inherited wealth of an unspecified but doubtless wholly respectable sort.

He was not a landed man. His country house, pleasantly situated a few miles from the Cornish coast, had extensive gardens but was unsupported by any surrounding agricultural activities. The dividends came in, and that was that. Nobody could have thought of it as a particularly vulnerable asset.

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Some adverse change in the state of the national economy might be expected from time to time to produce a correspondingly adverse effect on an income such as Vandervell's. But it would surely require a recession, a depression, or a slump of major order to result in anything like a catastrophe.

Vandervell himself was vague about the whole thing. This might have been put down to simple incompetence, since it would certainly have been difficult to imagine a man with less of a head for practical affairs. But there were those who maintained that some feeling of guilt was operative as well.

He was uneasy about living a life of leisure on the labors of others, and was unwilling to face up to considering his mundane affairs at all. He occasionally spoke in an old-fashioned way about his "man of business." Nobody had ever met this personage, or could so much as name him; but it was obvious that he must occupy a key position in the conduct of his client's monetary affairs. Vandervell himself acknowledged this. "Bound to say," he had once declared to Appleby, "that my financial wizard earns his fees. No hope of keeping my chin above water at all if I didn't have him on the job. And even as it is, I can't be said to be doing too well."

For some months this last persuasion had been gaining on Vandervell rapidly and throwing him into ever deepening gloom. One reading of this was clearly that the gloom was irrational—a depressive state generated entirely inside the unfortunate man's own head—and that a mere fantasy of being hard up, quite unrelated to the objective facts of the case, was one distressing symptom of his condition. One does hear every now and then, after all, of quite wealthy people who have stopped the delivery of milk and newspapers out of a firm conviction they can no longer afford to pay for them.

There was a point at which Appleby took this view of Vandervell's state of mind. Vandervell was a fairly prolific writer, and his essays and papers began to suggest that the adverse state of his bank balance (whether real or imagined) was bringing him to a vision that the universe at large was weighted against him and all mankind in an equally disagreeable way. Hitherto his philosophical work had been of a severely intellectual and dispassionate nature. Now he produced in rapid succession a paper on Schopenhauer, a paper

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on von Hartmann, and a long essay called *Existentialism and the Metaphysic of Despair.* All this didn't precisely suggest cheerfulness.

This was the state of the case when Appleby encountered Vandervell's nephew, Fabian Vandervell, in a picture gallery off Bond Street and took him to his club for lunch.

"How is your uncle getting along?" Appleby asked. "He doesn't seem to come much to town nowadays, and it's a long time since I've been down your way."

Fabian, who was a painter, also lived in Cornwall—more or less in a colony of artists in a small fishing village called Targan Bay. As his uncle was a bachelor, and he himself was his uncle's only near relation, it was generally assumed that Fabian would prove to be his uncle's sole heir. The prospect was probably important to him, since nobody had ever heard of Fabian's selling a picture. So Fabian too might well be concerned at the manner in which the family fortunes were thought to be in a decline.

"He muddles along," Fabian said. "And his interests continue to change for the worse, if you ask me. Did you ever hear of a book called *Biathanatos?*"

"It rings a faint bell."

"It's by John Donne, and is all about what Donne liked to call 'the scandalous disease of headlong dying.' It caused a bit of a scandal, I imagine. Donne was Dean of St. Paul's, you remember, as well as a poet; so he had no business to be fudging up any apology for suicide. Uncle Charles is talking about editing *Biathanatos,* complete with his own learned commentary on the theme. Morbid notion." Fabian paused. "Uncommonly nice claret you have here."

"I'm delighted you approve of it." Appleby noticed that the modest decanter of the wine with which Fabian had been provided was already empty. "Do you mean that you are alarmed about your uncle?"

"Well, he does talk about suicide in a general way. But perhaps there's no real cause for alarm."

"We'll hope not." Appleby decided not to pursue this topic, which didn't strike him as his business to discuss. "I have in mind calling on your uncle, incidentally, in a few weeks' time, when I go down to visit my sister at Bude. And now I want you to explain to me those pictures we both found ourselves looking at this morning. Puzzling things to one of my generation."

Fabian Vandervell proved perfectly willing to accept this

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invitation. He held forth contentedly for the rest of the meal.

Appleby fulfilled his intention a month later, and his first impression was that Charles Vandervell had become rather a lonely man. Pentallon Hall was a substantial dwelling, yet apart from its owner only an elderly manservant called Litter was in evidence. But at least one gardener must be lurking around, since the extensive grounds which shielded the place from the general surrounding bleakness of the Cornish scene were all in apple-pie order.

Vandervell led Appleby over all this with the air of a country gentleman who has nothing in his head except the small concerns which the managing of such a property must generate. But the role wasn't quite native to the man, and in an indefinable way none of the interests or projects which he paraded appeared quite to be coming off.

Vandervell had a theory about bees, but the Pentallon bees were refusing to back it up. In a series of somewhat suburban-looking ponds he bred tropical fish, but even the mild Cornish climate didn't suit these creatures at all. Nor at the moment did it suit the roses that Vandervell was proposing to exhibit at some local flower show later in the season: they were plainly (like so much human hope and aspiration, their owner commented morosely) nipped in the bud.

All in all, Charles Vandervell was revealing himself more than ever as a man not booked for much success except, conceivably, within certain rather specialized kingdoms of the mind.

Or so Appleby thought until Mrs. Mountmorris arrived. Mrs. Mountmorris was apparently a near neighbor and almost certainly a widow; and Mrs. Mountmorris came to tea. Litter took her arrival distinguishably in ill part; he was a privileged retainer of long standing, and seemingly licensed to express himself in such matters through the instrumentality of heavy sighs and sour looks.

On the other hand, Vandervell brightened so markedly when the lady was announced that Appleby at once concluded that Litter had rational ground for viewing her as a threat to the established order of things at Pentallon. Moreover, Vandervell took considerable pleasure in presenting Appleby to the new arrival, and Mrs. Mountmorris obligingly treated her host's friend as a celebrity.

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It was, of course, a quiet part of the world. But Appleby, being well aware of Vandervell as owning a distinction of quite another flight to that attainable by a policeman, found in this piece of nonsense something a little touching as well as absurd.

Not that, beneath an instant social competence, Mrs. Mountmorris was in the least pleased at finding another visitor around. She showed herself at once as a woman of strong character, and perhaps as one who was making it her business to take her philosophic neighbor in hand. If that was it—if she had decided to organize Charles Vandervell—then organized Charles Vandervell would be. On the man's chances of escape, Appleby told himself, he wouldn't wager so much as a bottle of that respectable claret to which he had entertained Vandervell's nephew Fabian at his club. And Fabian, if he knew about the lady, would certainly take as dark a view of her as Litter obviously did.

"Charles's roses," Mrs. Mountmorris said, "refuse to bloom. His bees produce honey no different from yours, Sir John, or mine." Mrs. Mountmorris paused to dispense tea—a duty which, to Litter's visible displeasure, she had made no bones about taking upon herself. "As for his ships, they just won't come home. *Mais nous changerons tout cela.*"

This, whatever one thought of the French, was nothing if not forthright, and Appleby glanced at the lady with some respect.

"But a philosopher's argosies," Appleby said a shade pedantically, "must voyage in distant waters, don't you think? They may return all the more richly freighted in the end."

"Of *that* I have no doubt." Mrs. Mountmorris spoke briskly and dismissively, although the dismissiveness may have been directed primarily at Appleby's flight of fancy. "But practical issues have to be considered as well. And Charles, I think, has come to agree with me. Charles?"

"Yes, of course." Thus abruptly challenged, Vandervell would have had to be described as mumbling his reply. At the same time, however, he was gazing at his female friend in an admiration there was no mistaking.

"Has that man turned up yet?" Mrs. Mountmorris handed Vandervell his teacup and at the same time indicated that he might consume a cucumber sandwich. "The showdown is overdue."

"Yes, of course." Vandervell repeated with a nervous nod

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that appeared to be his leitmotif in Mrs. Mountmorris' presence. "And I've sent for him. An absolute summons, I assure you. And you and I must have a talk about it, tête-à-tête, soon."

"Indeed we must." Mrs. Mountmorris was too well-bred not to accept this as closing the mysterious topic she had introduced. "And as for *these*"—she gestured at an unpromising rosebed near the tea table—"derris dust is the answer, and nothing else."

After this, Appleby didn't linger at Pentallon for very long. His own call had been casual and unheralded. It would be tactful to let that tête-à-tête take place sooner rather than later. Driving on to his sister's house at Bude, he reflected that Mrs. Mountmorris must be categorized as a good thing. Signs were not wanting that she was putting some stuffing into Charles Vandervell, of late so inclined to unwholesome meditation on headlong dying.

It was almost as if a worm were going to turn. Yet one ought not, perhaps, jump to conclusions. On an off day, and to a diffident and resigned man, the lady might well assume the character of a last straw. Litter, certainly, was seeing her in that light. His gloom as he politely performed the onerous duty of opening the door of Appleby's car, suggested his being in no doubt, at least, that the roses would be deluged in derris dust before the day was out.

Appleby hadn't, however, left Pentallon without a promise to visit again on his return journey, which took place a week later. This time he phoned to announce his arrival. He didn't want to find himself again that sort of awkward extra whom the Italians style a *terzo incomodo*.

Litter answered the telephone, and in a manner which instantly communicated considerable agitation. Mr. Vandervell, he said abruptly, was not in residence. Then, as if recalling his training, he desired Appleby to repeat his name so that he might apprise his employer of the inquiry on his return.

"Sir John Appleby."

"Oh, yes, sir—yes, indeed." It was as if a penny had dropped in the butler's somber mind. "Pray let me detain you for a moment, Sir John. We are in some distress at Pentallon—really very perturbed, sir. The fact is that Mr. Vandervell has disappeared. Without a trace, Sir John, as the newspapers sometimes express it. Except that I have received a letter from him—a letter susceptible

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of the most shocking interpretation."

Litter paused on this—as if it were a phrase in which, even in his perturbation, he took a certain just satisfaction. "To tell you the truth, sir, I have felt it my duty to inform the police. I wonder whether you could possibly break your journey here, as you had proposed? I know your reputation, Sir John, begging your pardon."

"My dear Litter, my reputation scarcely entitles me to impose myself on the Cornish constabulary. Are they with you now?"

"Not just at the moment, sir. They come and go, you might say. And very civil they are. But it's not at all the kind of thing we are accustomed to."

"I suppose not. Is there anybody else at Pentallon?"

"Mr. Fabian has arrived from Targan Bay. And Mr. Truebody, sir, who is understood to look after Mr. Vandervell's affairs."

"It's Mr. Truebody whom Mr. Vandervell refers to as his 'man of business'?"

"Just so, sir. I wonder whether you would care to speak to Mr. Fabian? He is in the library now, sorting through his uncle's papers."

"The devil he is." Appleby's professional instinct was alerted by this scrap of information. "It mightn't be a bad idea to call him. Please tell him I'm on the telephone."

Within a minute of this, Fabian Vandervell's urgent voice was on the line.

"Appleby, is it really you? For God's sake come over to this accursed place quick. You must have gathered even from that moronic Litter that something pretty grim has happened to my uncle. Unless he's merely up to some ghastly foolery, the brute fact is that *Biathanatos* has nobbled him. You're a family friend—"

"I'm on the way," Appleby said, and put down the receiver.

But Appleby's first call was at a police station, since there was a certain measure of protocol to observe. An hour later, and accompanied by a Detective-Inspector called Gamley, he was in Charles Vandervell's library, and reading Charles Vandervell's letter.

My dear Litter,

There are parties one does not quit without making a round of the room, and just such a party I am now preparing to take my leave of. In this instance it must be a round of letters that is in question, and of these the first must assuredly be addressed to you, who have been so faithful

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a servant and friend. I need not particularize the manner of what I propose to do. This will reveal itself at a convenient time and prove, I hope, not to have been too untidy. And now, all my thanks! I am only sorry that the small token of my esteem which is to come to you must, in point of its amount, reflect the sadly embarrassed state of my affairs.

Yours sincerely,
Charles Vandervell

"Most affecting," Mr. Truebody said. "Litter, I am sure you were very much moved." Truebody was a large and powerful-looking man, disadvantageously possessed of the sort of wildly staring eyes popularly associated with atrocious criminals. Perhaps it was to compensate for this that he exhibited a notably mild manner.

"It was upsetting, of course." Litter said this in a wooden way. Since he had so evident a difficulty in liking anybody, it wasn't surprising that he didn't greatly care for the man of business. "But we must all remember," he added with mournful piety, "that while there is life there is hope. A very sound proverb that is—if an opinion may be permitted me."

"Exactly!" Fabian Vandervell, who had been standing in a window and staring out over the gardens, turned round and broke in unexpectedly. "At first, I was quite bowled over by this thing. But I've been thinking. And it seems to me—"

"One thing at a time, Fabian." Appleby handed the letter back to Gamley, who was in charge of it. "Was this simply left on Mrs. Vandervell's desk?"

"It came by mail."

"Then where's the envelope?"

"Mr. Litter"—Gamley favored the butler with rather a grim look—"has unfortunately failed to preserve it."

"A matter of habit, sir." Litter was suddenly extremely nervous. "When I open a postal communication I commonly drop the outer cover straight into the wastepaper basket in my pantry. It was what I did on this occasion, and unfortunately the basket was emptied into an incinerator almost at once."

"Did you notice the postmark?"

"I'm afraid not, sir."

"The envelope, like the letter itself, was undoubtedly in Mr. Vandervell's handwriting?"

"No, sir. The address was typewritten."

"That's another point—and an uncommonly odd one." Fabian had advanced to the center of the room. "It makes

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me feel the whole thing is merely funny business, after all. And there's the further fact that the letter isn't dated. I'm inclined to think my uncle may simply have grabbed it from the pile, gone off Lord knows where, then typed out an envelope and mailed it in pursuance of some mere whim or fantasy."

"Isn't that pretty well to declare him insane?" Appleby looked hard at Fabian. "And just what do you mean by 'the pile'?"

"I believe he was always writing these things. Elegant valedictions. Making sure that nothing so became him in his life as—"

"We've had Donne; we needn't have Shakespeare, too." Appleby was impatient. "I must say I don't find the notion of your uncle occasionally concocting such things in the least implausible, psychologically regarded. But is there any hard evidence?"

"I've been hunting around, as a matter of fact. In his papers, I mean. I can't say I've found anything. Uncle Charles may have destroyed any efforts of the kind when he cleared out, taking this prize specimen to Litter with him."

"Isn't all this rather on the elaborate side?" Truebody asked, with much gentleness of manner. "I am really afraid that we are failing to face the sad simplicity of the thing. Everybody acquainted with him knows that Vandervell has been turning increasingly melancholic. We just have to admit that this had reached a point at which he decided to make away with himself. So he wrote this perfectly genuine letter to Litter, and perhaps others we haven't yet heard of."

"Why did he take it away and mail it?" Inspector Gamley demanded.

"That's obvious enough, I should think. He wanted to avoid an immediate hue and cry, such as might have been started at once had he simply left the letter to Litter behind him."

"It's certainly a possibility," Appleby said. "Would you consider, Mr. Truebody, that such a delaying tactic on Vandervell's part may afford some clue to the precise way in which he intended to commit suicide? He tells Litter it isn't going to be too untidy."

"I fear I am without an answer, Sir John. The common thing, where a country gentleman is involved, is to take out a shotgun and fake a more or less plausible accident at a stile. But Vandervell clearly didn't propose any faking. The letter shows that his suicide was to be

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declared and open. I feel that this goes with his deepening morbidity."

"But that's not, if you ask me, how Mr. Vandervell was feeling at all." Litter had spoken suddenly and with surprising energy. "For he'd taken the turn, as they say. Or that's my opinion."

"And just what might you mean by that, Mr. Litter?" Gamley had produced a notebook, as if he felt there was too much unrecorded chat.

"I mean that what Mr. Truebody says isn't what you might call up to date. More than once, just lately, I've told myself that Mr. Vandervell was cheering up a trifle—and high time, too. More confident, in a manner of speaking. Told me off once or twice about this or that. I can't say I was pleased at the time. But it's what makes me a little hopeful now."

"This more aggressive stance on your employer's part," Appleby asked, "disposes you against the view that he committed suicide?"

"Yes, Sir. John. Precisely that."

There was a short silence, which was broken by a constable's entering the library. He walked up to Gamley, then hesitated—as if doubtful whether what he had to say ought to be communicated to the company at large. Then he took the plunge.

"Definite news at last, sir. And just what we've been afraid of. They've discovered Mr. Vandervell's body—washed up on a beach near Targan Bay."

"Drowned, you mean?"

"Yes, sir. Beyond doubt, the report says. And they're looking for his clothes now."

"His clothes?"

"Just that, sir. The body was stark naked."

Although the North Cornish coast was only a few miles away, Charles Vandervell had no regular habit of bathing there—this although he was known to be an accomplished swimmer. Even if the letter to Litter had never been written, it would have had to be judged extremely improbable that his death could be accounted for as an accident following on a sudden whim to go bathing.

For one thing, Targan Bay and its environs were not so unfrequented that a man of conventional instincts (and Vendervell was that) would have been likely to dispense with some decent scrap of swimming apparel. On the other hand—or this, at least, was the opinion expressed by his nephew—a resolution to drown himself might well have been accompanied by just that. To

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strip naked and swim straight out to sea could well have seemed to Vandervell as the tidy thing.

Yet there were other possibilities, and Appleby saw one of them at once. The sea—and particularly a Cornish sea—can perform astonishing tricks with a drowned man. It can transform into a nude corpse a sailor who has gone overboard in oilskins, sea boots, and a great deal else. It can thus cast up a body itself unblemished. Or it can go on to whip and lacerate such a body to a grim effect of sadistic frenzy. Or it can set its own living creatures, tiny perhaps but multitudinous, nibbling till the bones appear. What particular fate awaits a body is all a matter of rocks and shoals—shoals in either sense—and of currents and tides.

Appleby had a feeling that the sea might still yield up some further secret about Charles Vandervell. Meantime, it was to be hoped there was more to be learned on land. The circumstances of the missing man's disappearance plainly needed investigation.

Appleby's first visit to Pentallon had been on a Monday, and it was now a Monday again. According to Litter, the remainder of that first Monday had been uneventful, except in two minor regards. The formidable Mrs. Mountmorris had stayed on almost till dinnertime, which wasn't Litter's notion of an afternoon call. There had been a business discussion of some sort and it had been conducted with sufficient circumspection to prevent Litter, who had been curious, from hearing so many as half a dozen illuminating words. But Litter rather supposed (since one must speak frankly in the face of a crisis like the present) that the lady had more than a thought of abandoning her widowed state, and that she was in process of thoroughly sorting out Vandervell's affairs before committing herself.

When she had at length gone away Vandervell had made a number of telephone calls. At dinner he had been quite cheerful—or perhaps it would be better to say that he had appeared to be in a state of rather grim satisfaction. Litter confessed to having been a little uncertain of his employer's wavelength.

The next day, Tuesday morning, Mr. Truebody had turned up at Pentallon, but he hadn't stayed long. Litter had received the impression—just in passing this library door, as he had several times been obliged to do—that Mr. Truebody was receiving instructions which

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were being pretty forcefully expressed. No doubt Mr. Truebody himself would speak as to that. There had been no question, Litter said, of the two gentlemen having words. Or it might be better to say there had been no question of their having a row—not as there had been with Mr. Fabian when he turned up on the same afternoon. And about *that*, Litter supposed, Mr. Fabian would speak.

This sensational disclosure on Litter's part could have been aimed only at Appleby, since Inspector Gamley turned out to have been informed of it already. And Fabian seemed to have made no secret of what he now termed lightly a bit of a tiff. He had formed the same conjecture about Mrs. Mountmorris' intentions as Litter had done, and he was ready to acknowledge that the matter wasn't his business. But between him and his uncle there was some obscure matter of a small family trust.

In the changed situation now showing every sign of blowing up he had come to Pentallon resolved to get this clarified. His uncle had been, in his view, quite unjustifiably short with him, saying that he had much more important things on his mind. So a bit of a rumpus there had undoubtedly been. But as he had neither carried Uncle Charles out to sea and drowned him, nor so effectively bullied him as to make him go and drown himself, he really failed to see that Litter's coming up with the matter had much point.

Listening to all this, Appleby was not wholly disinclined to agree. He had a long experience of major catastrophes bringing unedifying episodes of a minor order to light. So he went on to inquire about the following day, Wednesday, which looked as if it might have been the point of crisis.

And Wednesday displayed what Inspector Gamley called a pattern. It was the day of the week on which Pentallon's two maidservants, who were sisters, enjoyed their free half day together. Immediately after lunch Vandervell had started fussing about the nondelivery of a consignment of wine from a merchant in Bristol. He had shown no particular interest about this negligence before, but now he had ordered Litter to get into a car and fetch the stuff from Bristol forthwith.

And as soon as Litter had departed in some indignation on this errand (Bristol being, as he pointed out, a hundred miles away, if it was a step), Vandervell had accorded both his gardener and his gardener's boy

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the same treatment—the quest, this time, being directed to Exeter and a variety of horticultural needs (derris dust among them, no doubt). Apart from its proprietor, Pentallon was thus dispopulated until the late evening.

When Litter returned he was in a very bad temper, so that he retired to his own quarters for the night without any attempt to report to his employer. And since his first daily duty in the way of personal attendance was to serve lunch, and since the maids (as he explained) were both uncommonly stupid girls, it was not until afternoon the next day, Thursday, that there was a general recognition of something being amiss. And at this point Litter had taken it into his head that he must behave with discretion, and not precipitately spread abroad the fact of what might be no more than eccentric (and perhaps obscurely improper) behavior on the part of the master of Pentallon.

The consequence of all this was that it took Charles Vandervell's letter, delivered on Friday, to stir Litter into alerting the police. And by then Vandervell had been dead for some time. Even on superficial examination, it appeared, the police surgeon was definitely convinced of that.

Establishing this rough chronology satisfied Appleby for the moment, and he reminded himself that he was at Pentallon not as a remorseless official investigator but merely as a friend of the dead man and his nephew. That Charles Vandervell *was* now definitely known to be dead no doubt meant for Inspector Gamley a switching to some new procedure which he had better be left for a time to pursue undisturbed. So Appleby excused himself, left the house, and wandered thoughtfully through the gardens.

The roses were still not doing too well, but what was on view had its interest all the same. From a raised terrace walk remote from the house there was a glimpse of the sea. Appleby had surveyed this for some moments when he became aware that he was no longer alone. Truebody, that somewhat mysterious man of business, had come up behind him.

"Are you quite satisfied with this picture, Sir John?" Truebody asked.

"This picture?" For a second Appleby supposed that this was an odd manner of referring to the view. Then he understood. "I'd have to be clearer as to just what the picture is supposed to be before I could answer that one."

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"Why should Vandervell clear the decks—take care to get rid of Litter and the rest of them—if he was simply proposing to walk over *there*" —Truebody gestured toward the horizon—"for the purpose of drowning himself? It was so unnecessary, and that worries me. He could simply have said he was going for a walk, or even that he was going out to dinner. He could have said half a dozen things. Don't you agree?"

"Yes, I think I do—in a way. But one has to allow for the fact that the mind of a man contemplating suicide is quite likely to work a shade oddly. Vandervell may simply have felt the need of a period of solitude, here at Pentallon, in which to arrive at a final decision. Anyway, he *has* been drowned."

"Indeed, yes. And his mailing that letter immediately beforehand does seem to rule out accident. Unless, of course, he was putting on a turn."

"A turn, Mr. Truebody?"

"One of those just-short-of-suicide efforts which psychologists nowadays interpret as a cry for help."

"That's often a valid explanation of unsuccessful suicide, no doubt. But what would the cry for help be designed to save him from? Would it be the embrace of that predatory Mrs. Mountmorris?"

"It hadn't occurred to me that way." Truebody looked startled. "But something else has. Say that Vandervell was expecting a visitor here at Pentallon, and that for some reason he didn't want the circumstance to be known. That would account for his clearing everybody out. Then the visit took place, and was somehow disastrous. Or perhaps it just *didn't* take place, and there was for some reason disaster in the mere fact of that. And it was only *then* that he decided to write that letter to Litter as a preliminary to walking down to the sea and drowning himself." Truebody glanced sharply at Appleby. "What do you think of that?"

"I think I'd call it the change-of-plan theory of Charles Vandervell's death. I don't know that I'd go all the way with it. But I have a sense of its being in the target area, of there having been some element of improvisation in the affair . . . Ah, here is our friend the constable again."

"Inspector Gamley's compliments, sir." The constable appeared to feel that Appleby rated considerable formality of address. "A further message has just come through. They've found the dead man's clothes."

"Abandoned somewhere on the shore?"

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"Not exactly, sir. Washed up like the body itself, it seems—but in a small cove more than a mile farther west. That's our currents, sir. The Inspector has gone over to Targan Bay at once. He wonders if you'd care to follow him."

"Thank you. I'll drive over now."

Vandervell's body had been removed for immediate post-mortem examination, so it was only his clothes that were on view. And of these most were missing. It was merely a jacket and trousers, entangled in each other and grotesquely entwined in seaweed, that had come ashore. Everything else was probably lost.

"Would he have gone out in a boat?" Appleby asked.

"I'd hardly think so." Gamley shook his head. "One way or the other, such a craft would have been found by now. I'd say he left his clothes near the water, and they were taken out by the tide. Now they're back again. Not much doubt they've been in the sea for about as long as Vandervell himself was."

"Anything in the pockets—wallet, watch, that kind of thing?"

"Both these, and nothing else." Gamley smiled grimly. "Except for what you might call one or two visitors. All laid out next door. Would you care to see?"

"Decidedly, Inspector. But what do you mean by visitors?"

"Oh, just these." Gamley had ushered Appleby into the next room in the Targan Bay police station and was pointing at a table. "Inquisitive creatures that one gets in these waters. The crab was up a trouser leg, and the little fish snug in the breast pocket of the jacket."

"I see." Appleby peered at these odd exhibits. "I see," he repeated, but this time on a different note. "Will the post-mortem have begun?"

"Almost sure to have."

"Then get on to them at once. Tell them—very, very tactfully—to be particularly careful about the bottom of the lungs. Then I'll put through a call to London myself, Inspector. We must have a top ichthyologist down by the night train."

"A *what*, sir?"

"An authority on fish, Inspector. And there's another thing. You can't risk an arrest quite yet. But you can make damned sure somebody doesn't get away."

Appleby offered explanations on the following afternoon.

"It has been my experience

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that the cleverest criminals are often prone to doing some single, isolated, stupid thing—particularly when under pressure and driven to improvise. In this case it lay in the decision to mail that letter to Litter, instead of just leaving it around the house. The idea was to achieve a delaying tactic, and there was a sense in which a typewritten address would be safer than one which forged Vandervell's hand. But it introduced at once what was at least a small implausibility.

"Vandervell, while obsessed with suicide, may well have prepared a dozen such letters, and without getting round either to addressing or to dating them. But if he later decided that one of them was really to be delivered—and delivered through the mail—the natural thing would simply be to pick up an envelope and address it by hand."

"Was that the chap's only slip-up?"

"Not exactly. The crime must be called one of calculation and premeditation, I suppose, since the idea was to get the perpetrator out of a tough spot. But its actual commission was rash and unthinking, so that it left him in a tougher spot still. Consider, for a start, the several steps that led to it. Charles Vandervell's supposed financial reverses were entirely a consequence of sustained and ingenious speculations on Truebody's part. They didn't, as a matter of fact, *need* to be all that ingenious, since our eminent philosopher's practical sense of such matters was zero.

"But then Mrs. Mountmorris enters the story. She is a very different proposition. Truebody is suddenly in extreme danger, and he knows it. His client's attitude stiffens; in fact, you may say the worm turns. Truebody is summoned to Pentallon, and appears on Tuesday morning. He is given only until the next day to show, if he can, that everything has been fair and aboveboard, after all.

"But Charles Vandervell has a certain instinct for privacy. If there is to be a row, he doesn't want it to be broadcast. When Truebody comes back on Wednesday afternoon there is nobody else around. And I suppose that puts ideas in his head."

"So he waits his chance?" Fabian Vandervell asked.

"Not exactly that. Imagine the two of them walking around the garden. Your uncle is a new man; he has this dishonest rascal cornered and is showing grim satisfaction in the fact. He says roundly that he'll have Truebody prosecuted and jailed. And, at that, Truebody

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simply hits out at him. He's a powerful fellow; and, for the moment at least, your uncle is knocked unconscious.

"It all happened beside one of those small ponds with the tropical fish. So it is *now* that Truebody sees—or thinks he sees—his chance. He will stage some sort of accident, he tells himself. In a moment he has pushed your uncle into the pond. And there he holds him under until he drowns. So far, so good—or bad. But the accident looks a damned unlikely one, all the same. And then he remembers something."

"*Biathanatos*, and all that."

"Precisely—and something more. Truebody has had plenty of opportunity, during business visits to Pentallon, to poke about among your uncle's papers. He remembers that batch of elegant farewells by a Charles Vandervell about to depart this life by his own hand—"

"But nobody would try to drown himself in a shallow fishpond. It simply couldn't be done."

"Exactly, Fabian. And as soon as Truebody had slipped into the empty house and secured that batch of letters he heaved your uncle's body into his car and drove hard for the sea. And there, let us say, he further did his stuff."

"And later mailed that letter to Litter. After which he had nothing to do but lie low—and get busy, no doubt, covering up on the financial side."

"He didn't quite lie low. Rashly again he took the initiative in holding rather an odd conversation with me. He thought it clever of himself to advance one or two considerations which were bound to be in my head anyway."

"And now he's under lock and key." Fabian Vandervell frowned. "Good Lord! I'm forgetting I still haven't the faintest notion how you tumbled to it all."

"That was the shubunkin."

"What the devil is that?"

"Small tropical fish—decidedly not found in the sea off Cornwall. A shubunkin deftly made its way into your uncle's breast pocket while Truebody was holding his head down in that pond."

"Well, I'm damned! But it doesn't sound much on which to secure a conviction for murder."

"It's not quite all, Fabian. In your uncle's lungs there was still quite a bit of the water he was drowned in. Full of minute freshwater-pond life."

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a *NEW* Rand story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Jeffery Rand, head of the Department of Concealed Communications, didn't like the case. Who ever heard of espionage and prizefighting linked together? . . . This is the 25th adventure of Rand, the counterspy-and-detective known as the Double-C man . . .

THE SPY WITH THE KNOCKOUT PUNCH

by EDWARD D. HOCH

Ham Barsay was breathing hard as the referee held up his gloved right fist and declared him the winner. Barsay wiped the specks of blood from his face and acknowledged the thunderous cheers of the crowd. Then, while his manager held the ropes wide for his passage, he gathered the satin robe about his shoulders and strutted out of the ring, carefully avoiding any glance at his fallen foe. He felt no compassion for what had happened to Ricky Mason.

The aisle was a turmoil of friends and strangers and newsmen, all anxious to speak to him at once. A blond man forced an envelope into his gloved hand, perhaps for an autograph, and Barsay promptly dropped it. And finally there was the dressing room. "How's it feel?" a reporter asked. "That fight tonight makes you one of the top boxers in Britain!"

"I feel good," he answered honestly. "I feel wealthy."

"What's next, Ham?"

"A few more fights here, then the American champion!"

A roar went up from those within earshot. It was the answer they wanted to hear. As his manager and trainer cleared the dressing room, Ham signed a few autographs and then retired to the shower. He really did feel good, despite the bruises on his face. He felt like

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a man who had just won the most important fight of his life.

Drying himself after the shower, he listened to his manager's recap of the fight. "You were great in that second round, Ham. Just great!"

"I was great in the seventh round too, when I put him away with my knockout punch."

Eddie Sims, his manager, was a nervous little man who worried too much. He nodded agreement and said, "One of us should go to Ricky's dressing room to see how he is. They had to carry him outa the ring."

"You go, Eddie. You're good at that sort of thing."

"Who was the blond guy tried to give you something on the way back to the dressing room?"

"I never saw him before," Ham answered honestly. "It was an envelope or something. I dropped it. He probably wanted an autograph, like everyone else."

"Tough giving autographs with those gloves on."

"Yeah."

Eddie Sims disappeared through the door, returning a few minutes later. "Ricky's just coming around now. You hit him pretty hard."

"That's what the fans like. Look, take care of things, will you, Eddie? I've got a date."

"That Harding girl again?" Sims's voice was disapproving.

"Give me a break, Eddie! I'm out of training!"

"Sure, Champ." He patted Ham's beefy shoulders. "I'll call you tomorrow. If you're not home I'll try Sis Harding's apartment."

Ham finished dressing and left the arena by the rear exit to avoid any fans still waiting out front. The silver Jag was in his special parking place and within minutes he was driving through the London night to Sis Harding's flat in Chelsea. Sis was a free-lance commercial artist working for a number of leading advertising agencies. He'd met her at a party a year earlier, and their affair since then had been a favorite subject for the press. She was a lithe blonde girl with long straight hair. Now, seeing her at the door to greet him, he knew she'd washed it not long before.

"Seven rounds, Ham! Just like you said!" She'd heard the fight on the radio.

He kissed her lightly on the lips. "I'm dependable."

"Hungry?"

"Starving. But I have to go somewhere first."

"Where's that?"

"Favor for a friend. Can I borrow your car?"

"I guess so. Why all the mystery?"

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He kissed her again. "I'll be back before you know it."

He went down the back stairs which led to a little alley behind the building. Sis Harding's car was an ancient VW, but he knew it was in good condition. He drove it through the midnight streets till he reached a block of row-houses in a better part of London. He parked on a side street and walked quickly to the door he sought. The key worked smoothly.

He edged the door open and stepped inside the darkened house. The study was the first door on the right, he knew, and he moved silently, crossing the carpeted floor to the big desk in front of the windows. He snapped on his penlight, focusing on a locked attaché case.

As he reached for it the lights in the room suddenly went on. Ham Barsay whirled, his hand pulling back into a fist, but two strong men were already on him, pinning his arms.

"Now, now, sir," a third man said. "It won't do to struggle. Just come along quietly."

"What in hell is this?"

"You're under arrest, sir, for suspected violation of the Official Secrets Act."

It was a bad morning in the big building along the Thames that housed many of the diverse divisions of British Intelligence. Secure in his cubicle at Concealed Communications, Jeffery Rand did not realize quite how bad until he was summoned to Hastings' office in mid-morning.

"I suppose you've heard the news, Rand."

He thought a bit and then said, "About Ham Barsay?" because it was the only news he'd heard.

Hastings nodded. "Three hours after winning the fight he's arrested for espionage. It doesn't make sense, does it?"

"It seems unusual," Rand said. "I'll admit I never knew a prizefighter spy before."

"Neither did anyone else. Especially not someone of Barsay's reputation. He's a leading contender for the heavyweight championship of the world."

"What does he say about it?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all. He's asked for a lawyer and that's all."

"I gather you had Sir Stafford's home staked out. Any idea you'd bag Barsay?"

"None whatsoever. As near as we've been able to backtrack on his movements, he left the arena after the fight and drove to the flat of someone named

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Sis Harding, a commercial artist with whom he's been linked romantically. His quite distinctive car, a silver-colored Jaguar, was found parked outside her place."

Rand had resisted the question, but now he asked it. "How does Barsay concern me?"

Hastings leaned forward and rested his arms on the desk. "You're aware of what he was after in Sir Stafford's study?"

"No."

"As you know, Sir Stafford is head of the forthcoming trade mission to Moscow. In a locked attaché case on his desk was a copy of the special diplomatic code to be used by him for communications to London during the conference. The people in your department made it up for us."

"I remember something about it," Rand replied. "I believe Parkinson handled it."

"Of course you understand the importance of the code. During the lengthy negotiations we're expecting in Moscow this autumn it will be necessary for Sir Stafford to keep in regular communication with London. If the Russians could be privy to those messages, it would give them a dangerous advantage in the negotiations." He paused, noticing the smile on Rand's lips. "What's so humorous about all this?"

"Nothing, really. It's just that I remember when Russian spies were after our defense secrets. Now we're trying to prevent their getting the upper hand in trade negotiations. Times change."

"They do indeed," Hastings agreed gruffly. "But that doesn't change the seriousness of the matter. I want you to speak to Ham Barsay, find out what he knows, whom he's working for. You know the routine."

"Is he still in custody?"

"Yes, but he'll probably be free on bail by this evening. I would suggest you question him at once."

"All right," Rand agreed. He'd never met a heavyweight prizefighter before, and certainly not one who was a spy for the Russians.

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Ham Barsay was brought into the Interrogation Room shortly after noon. His face still showed the deep purple bruises and swollen jawline from the previous night's fight, and when he spoke it was with some difficulty.

"Your police could have worked me over for hours," he told Rand. "The condition my face is in, no one would have known the difference."

"Did they work you over?"

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"No. They've all behaved like perfect gentlemen. I suppose that's because I'm someone a wee bit important."

"You're very important," Rand said. "You may be the next heavyweight champion of the world—after you get out of prison in five years."

"Five years!"

"I'd guess that to be the sentence, if the judge is in a lenient mood. And if he's a fight fan."

"Oh, come on now! A little breaking and entering—"

"You're being charged under the Official Secrets Act, Mr. Barsay, as you well know. The codes contained in Sir Stafford's attaché case would be invaluable to the Russians. I want to know who hired you to steal them."

"Nobody hired me." The fighter rubbed his swollen jaw. "Why would I need the money?"

"Then what were you doing in Sir Stafford's study last night?"

"Let's just say I was doing a friend a favor."

"What friend? What favor?"

Ham Barsay only shook his head. "That's all I've got to say. I'll talk to you again when my lawyer's present."

Rand didn't argue. He knew a dead end when he heard one.

Sis Harding's flat overlooked a shop-lined street in Chelsea, and Rand knew at once from the professional lettering above her bell that she was an artist. The girl who admitted him was blonde and good-looking, with long straight hair and a manner of crossing her arms when she talked.

"Which are you—detective or reporter?" she asked at once, but made no move to bar his entrance while he thought of a suitable answer. Either way, she seemed to welcome the visit.

"I'm not exactly either one," he decided, "though you might classify me closer to the former than the latter." He showed her his identification from Double-C. "We're investigating the Barsay matter, and I understand he came here last evening after the fight. His car was found parked out front."

"Then I can't deny it, can I?" She crossed her arms and eyed him in a gently mocking manner.

"Would you have denied it?"

"Not now. With a bit of luck my photograph will be in the morning papers. Reputations in the art world have been made on far less."

"You're an artist?"

"Commercial art mainly, but I aspire to the higher forms."

"Don't we all?" Rand said. "Now what about Ham Barsay?"

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"I heard the fight on the radio and then he turned up a short time later. He said he had to go out again and asked to borrow my car. He left by the back stairs. That was the last I knew until this morning."

"You waited up for him?"

"Yes. But by two o'clock I was convinced he wasn't coming back, so I went to bed."

"Had he ever done anything like this before?"

"No. Never."

"You must have had some idea where he was going."

"I figured he wanted to unwind a bit after the fight. Sometimes just driving at high speeds over country roads can be relaxing for him. Everybody knows his car, so I imagine he took mine to remain anonymous."

"He might have had another purpose," Rand pointed out. "With his distinctive sports car parked in front of your flat all night, it provided him with quite an effective alibi. Any number of your neighbors could testify he spent the night here."

She didn't blush at the implication. Rand sometimes thought girls had stopped blushing about five years ago. It was something that came with Women's Lib. "Perhaps," she admitted. "In any event I can add nothing to what I've already told you. Certainly this accusation of espionage is as much a surprise to me as to everyone else."

"Any idea why he might have done it? Why should a famous sports figure, on the night of his greatest triumph, risk everything by getting involved in a shabby espionage plot? If he wanted Sir Stafford's codebook so badly, why didn't he hire someone to steal it?"

"I have no idea," she said, and he was inclined to believe her. She seemed open and honest, more interested in the publicity for herself than in any dark plots which might have engaged Ham Barsay.

"I may want to talk with you again," Rand said.

She gave him her best smile. "Any time. Call me first, and perhaps we can meet for cocktails. Much more comfortable than this stuffy apartment."

In the street the afternoon paper had the story. *Barsay Released on Bail; Spy Probe Continues.* Sis Harding's luck had been very good indeed. Her photograph was larger than Barsay's.

It took Rand until evening to track down Eddie Sims, Barsay's manager. The man was not at his home or office, but

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Rand finally ran him to earth just after dinner at the sports arena where the previous night's fight had taken place.

Eddie Sims was clearly nervous, moving among the rows of seats like a patron searching for a lost wallet. He looked up, startled at the sound of his name being called, and beckoned Rand to join him.

"Looks as if you've lost something," Rand said, stating the obvious.

Sims brushed it aside. "Nothing important. What can I do for you?"

"British Intelligence is quite concerned about this entire matter. It would seem that Ham Barsay attempted to steal a diplomatic codebook."

"Impossible! Ham's as good a citizen as you are. None of this Commie stuff for him!"

"Have you talked to him since his release?"

"No." Sims's eyes darted to the floor again. "I've been around here most of the afternoon."

Rand kicked at a candy wrapper. "Don't they clean up here after a fight?"

Sims grunted. "Some labor troubles. They'll be doing it tonight."

"If you don't think Ham is involved with the Communists, how do you explain what happened?"

"I can't explain it. All I know is that with the money he won last night there was no financial reason for him to sell out his country. The whole thing doesn't make sense." His eyes continued to scan the litter on the arena floor. "Unless—"

"Unless what? What are you searching for?"

Eddie Sims looked up, frowning. "I might as well tell you. On the way outa the ring last night a man in an aisle seat tried to hand Ham an envelope. Ham took it, but with his gloves on he couldn't open it. He let it drop, down here near the ring. I don't know—I thought it might have some connection with what happened. But I haven't been able to find it. Somebody probably picked it up."

Rand nodded, handing the manager a card. "If it turns up, give me a call at this number."

They shook hands and Rand started up the steps of the arena, heading back toward the door through which he'd entered. He was vaguely aware of a cleaning man who'd entered from the other side carrying a push broom. When he'd reached the top row of seats he turned back toward the ring and saw that Eddie Sims had called to the man with the broom. The two came together as Rand watched.

Then suddenly it happened.

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The workman's hand came out of his overalls and there was an echoing crack. Eddie Sims staggered backward, clawing at his chest, and tumbled over a row of seats.

The man in the overalls fired a second shot and then turned to flee. Rand shouted for him to stop, racing back down the steps in pursuit. But he had no weapon with him, and when the man turned to raise his gun again, Rand had to dive behind a row of seats.

A bullet drilled through the seat a few feet away and Rand kept his head down. When he dared look out, a few moments later, the aisles were empty. The gunman had fled.

He hurried down to Eddie Sims's side, but it was too late. The little manager was dead.

Rand cursed and hurried back up the steps, searching for an office with a telephone. It had happened right before his eyes and he'd been unable to stop it.

The following morning Rand sat slumped in the big corner chair in Hastings' office. Sir Stafford was there too, and someone from Scotland Yard. The case was taking on all the aspects of the flashy *cause celebre* the newspapers loved so much. Rand, by the very nature of his profession, preferred to work without publicity, without a constant entourage of reporters in search of a fresh slant for the next edition. The whole affair depressed him.

"You couldn't identify the killer?" Hastings wanted to know.

Rand stirred in his chair. "He was a tall man, well built, with dark hair. I was perhaps a hundred feet away when it happened, looking down on them. That's the best description I can give."

"Could the killer have been Ham Barsay?"

"It could have been," Rand admitted. "In those work clothes I might not have recognized him. And I never got a clear look at the killer's face."

Sir Stafford, a gray-haired diplomat with a kindly face and a reputation for being a tough bargainer, joined in. "The killing of this fight manager doesn't concern me half so much as the attempt to get at that codebook. How do we know our entire trade position hasn't been compromised?"

"The code in question was a computer printout," Rand explained, "with random letter groups standing for the necessary words. It's simple enough to do another printout and come up with a new code."

"I'd suggest you do that," Hastings decided with a glance

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at Sir Stafford. "It will relieve everyone's mind."

"I can't impress on you strongly enough the importance of these trade talks in Moscow," Sir Stafford said. "We—and the Americans as well—are entering a whole new era with the Russians and the Chinese." He smiled at Rand. "In a decade your department may be obsolete."

"Not the way things are going," Rand replied. "But tell me, Sir Stafford, what first led you to suspect someone was after that code? Why were the guards at your home in the first place?"

"My office was rifled a week ago. An assistant of mine, Mr. Jennings, surprised the intruder and received a broken jaw for his trouble. I guessed someone might be after the code and asked for a guard at my home."

"Did Jennings see the intruder?"

"No. The man was wearing a handkerchief over his face. It was at night, and Jennings just happened to return for something. Of course I had the code safely at home."

Hastings cleared his throat. "Knowing what we do now, it seems likely that the intruder was Ham Barsay. He punched Jennings hard enough to break his jaw, which certainly sounds like a prizefighter."

"But why?" Rand wanted to know. "Barsay is no down-and-outer scrounging for odd jobs as a thief. He's on top."

Hastings spoke again. "We've looked into his background quite a bit since the arrest. It's true he's never been arrested for anything before, but early in his career there were rumors of fixed fights. Some sportswriters still hint that a few of his opponents took a dive."

"Even if it's true that doesn't make him a spy," Rand pointed out.

Hastings turned to the Scotland Yard man. "What do we have on the killing?"

"Not much, sir. Barsay has dropped from sight since his release yesterday on bail. We're watching his home and the girl's apartment, but he hasn't turned up at either place."

"I asked that every scrap of paper on the floor of the arena be gathered up and examined," Rand said. "Has this been done?"

"Yes, sir." The Scotland Yard man, young and inexperienced in the ways of British Intelligence, was ill at ease. "You said envelopes. We found quite a number of empty ticket envelopes, of course, but only this one envelope with a message inside."

He handed it to Rand who opened it. A few words were

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printed in ink on a piece of paper: RAM—STAY AWAY. HOUSE GUARDED.

Rand passed the note to Hastings, who read it and frowned. "Ram instead of Ham? Did anyone ever call him Ram?"

"A mistake, I suppose. It was lettered in haste, I'd say."

"Too bad Barsay didn't read it."

"Indeed it is," Rand agreed. "He could have saved us all a great deal of grief."

Rand spent the rest of the day in his office at Double-C, poring over the routine problems of the past two days. Most things could be handled by Parkinson and the others without his intervention, and he'd learned long ago not to concern himself too much with the day-to-day routine of the department. The last time he'd gone down to the decoding room to help, he'd found the words *Mona Passage* in a message and spent a full afternoon searching for records of this female—until someone discovered it was merely the name of a strait separating Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. After that he'd stayed away.

He was halfway through a lengthy report on a new cipher being used by opium traders in Hong Kong when a sudden thought struck him. He picked up the phone and dialed Hastings' extension. "Rand here. Something just occurred to me. When Ham Barsay was arrested, was he carrying a camera of any sort?"

"No," Hastings replied. "Nothing like that. Only the duplicate key to Sir Stafford's front door and a small flashlight. We believe the key was obtained from a former servant."

"But no camera," Rand mused. "So what was Barsay going to do with the codebook?"

"I don't understand."

"Nobody just steals a codebook these days. Once it's stolen a new code can be easily made up on a computer. The object is to copy it, or photograph it, without the owner's knowledge. So what was Barsay going to do with the codebook?"

"Take it to someone, I suppose. The man who tried to pass him the note."

"Exactly. That man would be waiting outside, perhaps in a specially equipped truck or car. The pages would be copied and the codebook returned before morning."

"So what does that tell us?" Hastings asked irritably.

"I don't know," Rand

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admitted. "There's just something wrong with the entire setup. There's something wrong with the killing of Eddie Sims too, if I could only put my finger on it."

"Get a good night's sleep," Hastings advised. "Perhaps it'll seem clearer in the morning."

But instead of following Hastings' advice, Rand went back to Chelsea, to the upstairs flat occupied by Sis Harding. This time she was not so anxious to let him in, and that told him his hunch was correct.

"He's here, isn't he?"

"I don't know what you mean," she said, trying to close the door.

"Barsay. You're hiding him out. Tell him I have to see him."

"You can't come in here without a warrant."

"Just tell him. Tell him I came to help." Rand let up his pressure on the door and she slammed it shut. He waited, and nothing happened.

Five minutes later, as he was about to give up and leave, the apartment door opened a crack. "All right," Ham Barsay mumbled. "What do you want?"

"To help you."

"I don't need your help."

"You certainly need somebody's. Open the door."

Barsay let him in. The swelling had gone down on his jaw, but the bruised spots were still vivid. "How'd you know I was here?"

"I just decided where I'd go if I were you. How'd you get by the police downstairs?"

"I just faked a good limp. No one expects a heavyweight boxer to be a cripple. They never gave me a second look."

"Clever," Rand admitted. "Now what? Who are you hiding from—the police or someone else?"

"What do you mean?"

"The question I kept asking myself was *why?* Why were you spying for the Russians? And if you weren't spying, why keep quiet about the real reason you entered Sir Stafford's house that night?"

"And you know the answer?" Barsay asked.

"I think I do now. I think—"

"Ham!" Sis Harding, standing by the window, interrupted. "I think he's coming!"

Barsay smiled slightly. "You're just in time to see the showdown, Mr. Rand. Good thing you're here."

Rand walked quickly to the window. The figure below, crossing the street, looked very much like the dark-haired man who'd killed Eddie Sims. Rand couldn't see his face, but the build was about the same. He knew it was the man. "You

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fool, he won't come alone!"

"No sweat. I can handle him and his friend, too."

"The one who passed you the note?"

Barsay nodded. "I never got to read it."

"You should have."

There was a knock on the door, and Ham Barsay went to answer it. At the last instant Rand moved and toppled Barsay away from the door just as the fighter started to open it. The door splintered as a half-dozen bullets from silencers tore through it.

By the window Sis Harding screamed. Rand rolled over, off Barsay's back, and pulled his own gun free. This time he'd brought it. Sis was still screaming with fright, but he didn't look at her.

The first man through the door was a beefy blond who looked like an aging member of Hitler's youth corps. Rand saw the silenced sten gun in his hands and shot him twice in the chest.

The second man was the dark-haired one from the arena, the one who'd killed Eddie Sims. Rand got to his feet slowly, kicking the fallen sten gun out of reach and covering the man with his gun.

"That's it—hands over your head!" He motioned to the floor where Ham Barsay was just beginning to stir. "I already floored one heavyweight, so I guess I can handle another. We haven't met, but you're Ricky Mason, aren't you? The fighter Barsay beat the other night?"

Hastings looked up distastefully from his desk. "Were you trying to be a one-man army, Rand?"

"No, only trying to stay alive. The Scotland Yard men outside were noticeably slow in responding."

Hastings grunted. "The dead man was an East German who called himself Hans Schmidt. He was the one who handed the note to Barsay, and he would have copied the codebook had things gone according to plan. But you have a great deal of explaining to do about Ricky Mason. How'd you know he was the spy instead of Barsay?"

Rand leaned back in the chair. He felt drained of all energy, possibly because he'd already spent the night explaining it to a great many people at Scotland Yard. "We start with the killing of Eddie Sims, even though that was really the end of it, not the beginning. Eddie had seen the envelope passed to Ham Barsay after the fight, had seen Ham drop it. Eddie thought the envelope might be linked to later events, so he went searching for it.

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"Someone else came searching for it too, someone dressed as a workman. Sims recognized him, of course, and was killed. Now the question is—why was the envelope so valuable, and who was it valuable to? The message, when we found it, was a simple one. Certainly Ham Barsay had no reason to search for it, since it could hardly have incriminated him more than he already was. So I had to ask myself—could the message incriminate someone else? Was it meant, not for Ham, but for the mysterious Ram?"

"But the message was given to Ham after the fight."

"Exactly—*after* the fight. After he'd knocked Ricky Mason unconscious and won the fight. When I first questioned Ham about entering Sir Stafford's home he said he was doing a friend a favor. What if that was true? What if he was doing it for Ricky Mason, because Ricky was still unconscious back at the arena? Was there any evidence to support that wild idea? Yes, there was—I described Sims's killer as tall and well built. And the masked man who rifled Sir Stafford's office had a punch that could break a man's jaw. This pointed to a professional boxer, but I've already explained why I didn't think Ham had a reason to search for the envelope and kill Eddie. If Ham didn't do that, maybe he didn't rifle Sir Stafford's office either."

"And RAM was Ricky Mason's initials? His middle initial is A?"

"I'm sure you'll find it is. Otherwise, why was the note so important?"

"All right," Hastings conceded. "But what about the big question? *Why?* Why did Barsay do it? And after he was captured, why didn't he tell the truth?"

"It all becomes clear when I say four words," Rand told him. "Four words—*the fight was fixed!* Ricky Mason took a dive so Ham would win. Remember, we heard hints of previous fixes in Ham's past career. Ricky's only stipulation—other than money—was that if he got knocked out or hurt too badly, Ham had to do him a favor. Ham needed a knockout to make it look good, so he really punched when Ricky let down his guard in the seventh round. When Ricky didn't regain consciousness right away, Ham knew he had to do the favor for Ricky.

"Ham had ignored the envelope pressed on him after the fight, so he didn't know the plan was off. He used the key that Ricky had given him and entered Sir Stafford's home—to

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get back some divorce evidence, or so he believed. It was a favor for a friend who deserved it after taking that dive. When the lights went on and Ham found himself arrested, he could hardly tell the truth and admit the fight was fixed. Riding out a false accusation of espionage was better than admitting to a fixed fight that would ruin his career."

"Of course when Sims was murdered all that changed."

"Correct. Ham went into hiding with Sis Harding and then set up a showdown with Ricky. Luckily I was there."

"Ham was to deliver the attaché case to the man outside?"

"Right. And then return it after the so-called divorce evidence had been copied. You see, Ricky was a boxer on his way down to nowhere, taking dives and doing jobs like this for whoever paid the most. But when the job at Sir Stafford's conflicted with the big fight, he had to ask Ham to fill in for him. He didn't want to turn it down completely and lose his pay for it. When Ham was arrested and the case became big news, Ricky knew he had to find the note the German tried to give Ham—the note with his initials on it. And that led to killing Eddie Sims."

"A bad business," Hastings observed. "Not a very good start for the trade talks."

"And not a very good end for Sims and the German, and a couple of heavyweights."

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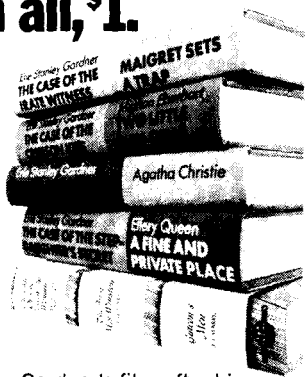

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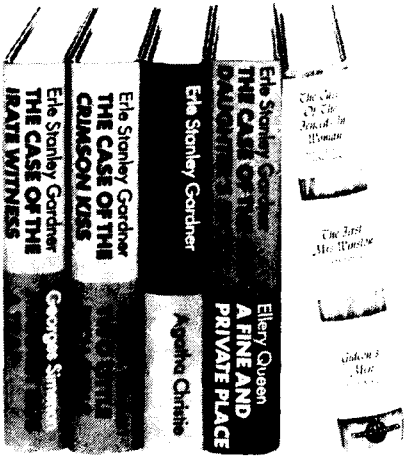

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